



9 Questions

BY SANDRA RICHARDSON
PHOTO BY STUART PALLEY

1 What is Magee Designs specialty? I do regionally-inspired designs like pueblo and territorial, but I have a passion for a 'regional-contemporary' style — traditional forms and concepts that stand out from the typical by using crisp, clean lines and unusual materials. Regardless of style, I design for compatibility with the landscape.

2 What makes you stand out from other home designers? One of my professional assets is years of experience in the construction and engineering field. I've worked on both sides of the drawing board, so I know how to build a building—not just draw one. I have spent a lot of time swinging a hammer and digging trenches, so I comprehend HOW things get built. I also have a life-long relationship with the building conditions unique to this area—I have a deep connection with the community, the culture and the history of this unique place. That's the value of working with a 'native son.' I know how strange and extraordinary Taos is, and I can help anyone navigate their way here.

3 How did you choose Taos as the location to follow this career? I was born here and I grew up on jobsites. My Dad, Vishu Magee, has been designing and building homes here since 1974. My brother, Aaron, is also a local builder. You could say, "It's in my blood." When I was two, I was my Dad's 'nail pouch.'

4 What services do you offer that are unique? As an additional tool for home buyer/builders, I offer a pre-design property-site evaluation, before the drawing stage. It is good to know the 'buildability' of the property before you buy. Down the road, this helps people avoid pitfalls. I look for the often over-looked issues: Can the site support septic? What difficulties will we encounter bringing in utilities? What are the ramifications of building on the slope? (County regulations here prohibit building on a 20 percent slope.) How high is the water table? Costs can escalate by thousands of dollars to compensate for some of these issues. My broad range of skills, as well as my excellent relationship with planning and zoning officials and sub-contractors, enable me to offer comprehensive site-cost evaluations.

5 What do you consider the key to 'green' building? Sustainability starts with design. So much can be achieved by properly orienting the house and maximizing the relationship to the sun and other site conditions. This is the foundation of any approach to green building, regardless of size, style, or the budget. Using nontoxic materials and systems that increase the health of the occupants is paramount. These considerations are often about just making the right choices along the way and don't require huge amounts of expense.

6 How effective is solar energy? Incorporating solar energy into a project is a lifestyle decision. I ask my clients to evaluate their relationship to their energy use, and then tailor systems and technology to who they are. One person wants to save money, while another person is concerned with their carbon footprint. One system may not serve both objectives. What you decide to pursue is inter-related to lifestyle, and should be a reflection of your goals and priorities.

7 You are an LEED Certified Professional. What is LEED? LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. LEED is a checklist to assure a project meets green building standards regulated by the United States Green Building Council. I endeavor to design and build according to the guidelines of this checklist to assure that a building performs at its highest level in regard to home energy use and human health. When a homeowner proceeds with the formalities of getting a home LEED certified, they get a certificate and a plaque. This adds to the resale value.

8 What do you enjoy most about your job? I really like working with people — even challenging people. I like to assist in designing their personal world. The design I create is about them and their story — it's not just another house!

9 What are you most excited about right now? The most exciting thing lately is my new website, because it is the first time I have the ability to showcase all my great work to inspire my clients. Take a look at www.jedmagee.com.