

Collections through the Eyes of Docents

In the early 1950s, Shirley Jolly Minge and Ward Alan Minge took a late 19th century adobe building and in Corrales and turned it into a plazuela-style rancho to house their collection of vernacular art from New Mexico's Spanish Colonial and Territorial periods into the twentieth-century. The collection is now explored and highlighted through docent led tours at Casa San Ysidro: The Gutiérrez/Minge House. *Collections through the Eyes of Docents* offers a behind the scenes look at the six histories and anecdotes collected from docent knowledge about the Minge Collection.



Priest's Chair By Linda Tigges

This 17th or early 18th century wooden armchair represents a frontier version of the decorated and sometimes gilded *silla de brazos* seen in paintings of Catholic dignitaries and in photos in Spanish Colonial furniture collections.

The straight-backed chair, found by Alan Minge at the Taos Pueblo, perhaps from the 1706 San Geronimo de Taos mission, is made of hand-adzed pine. It had wooden finials, now broken off; it has a torn buffalo hide backing held by bronze-headed tacks. The black painted circles on the front and back rails and stretchers, and the painted black lines, appear to be a local version of the extravagant use of bronze headed tacks and the carving seen on chairs of the Spanish and Mexico upper classes.

Fringed velveteen or other upholstery may have covered the seat, or perhaps it had a pillow such as that described in a 1716 New Mexican document from the *Archivo General de la Nación* of an Inquisition *visita* where the *Reverendo Padre Commisario* was "seated at the high altar with a chair (*silla*) and pillow (*almohada*)". It is considered one of the more important pieces in the Minge collection.



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Casa San Ysidro The Gutiérrez-Minge House

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Outhouse in Corral

By Karen McSorley

What a cute little house! Is it a place to keep the dog or store garden tools? If you have seen the movie "Shrek" or if you have elderly relatives who lived on farms you may know this is an outhouse- that is, an outdoor potty. On New Mexico farms in the 1870's there was no running water. Hence outdoor "Facilities "- set a distance from the house- were required.

How does an outhouse work? A pit is dug and lye is added as a disinfectant. The little house, with floorboards, is constructed over the pit. If we open the door and peek inside we will find a bench with from one to several holes. (Sizes of holes correspond to sizes of bottoms.) No flushing is required because there is no water.

What about toilet paper? In the 1870's it was a non- existent commodity. Because materials were scarce nothing got wasted. Many materials were repurposed rather than being thrown away. My dad's family raised pigs and fed them corn. The corn cobs were saved and recycled for use in the outhouse. (You get the idea!) Another clever outhouse recycle idea was old catalogs (Such as Sears). In my dad's family there were five boys so the bicycle pages were used last).

Note: If the weather was too inclement to trek to the outhouse, one could use the beautiful China pots with lids which were kept under the beds. One of the many chores for kids was emptying the chamber pots in the morning.



Pitchfork in the Stone Barn

By Carla Wright

About 5' in height, the pitchfork in the Stone Barn was fashioned from one piece of wood, possibly the hackberry tree. The long handle and the four tines are one single piece of wood; it was burnished to add strength for farm work.

Settlers had to utilize right brain or spatial qualities to solve survival needs: in the case of the pitchfork, being able to recognize branch and root formations as a basis for a tool. This visualization is the basis for artistry, source of artistic creation.

Colcha

By Jo Morris

The word *colcha* in Spanish means bedspread or quilt. In the Spanish Settlements of northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado in the early 1700s to the late 1800s, colchas were embroidered with a stitch called 'Colcha Stitch'. The inspiration might have come from a type of 16th century silk embroidered colcha from Spain and Portugal via Mexico. It is done on 'Sabanilla' a loosely home woven fabric and is embroidered with remnants of naturally dyed wool strands.

The types of designs used were greatly influenced by the American Indians. It had a revival in the 1930's and it continues today. This was done in the 1950's.



Tin Nicho

By Glynda Samford

Metal was scarce during colonial times, thus early New Mexicans used any materials available to decorate their homes and churches. Tin cans discarded by American soldiers became a common source of metal for decorative art works. Tin work was thought of as the poor man's silversmithing and decorated many early New Mexican homes and churches. This traditional art form is part of New Mexican culture. The tin and glass nicho is the work of Higinio Gonzales, a prolific tinsmith, and dates to 1885. It is decorated with crimped rosettes and the birds for which he was noted. Nichos originally included pictures of a saints or religious icons.

Zaguán Portones

By Dave Furbush

Zaguans like this one were the typical main entry points to New Mexico ranchos during the Spanish-Colonial and Mexican periods, and through much of the U.S. Territorial period. Few examples remain intact today, and this one at Casa San Ysidro is believed to be the oldest surviving example. It was salvaged from the Horace Long house at Talpa, New Mexico (near Rancho de Taos). Although portions of the house were built as early as 1816 (based on tree-ring dating), it's unknown when the Zaguán itself was constructed. However, architectural historian Bainbridge Bunting and other experts point to several features that support a theory that the Zaguán was repurposed at the Long house after previously serving as the entryway into a nearby Spanish-Colonial presidio or small fort.

Other accounts suggest that the fort itself was located onsite, adjacent to the house and was eventually incorporated into the evolving rancho, perhaps by Long himself after he arrived in 1839. Among the features that support the fort hypothesis are several unusual aspects of the doors (aka portones or puertones), which turn on ornate hand-forged iron truncheon hinges. Because iron was an expensive material during the early 19th century, such doors were typically set on wooden pintle hinges. Bunting speculated that such a prolific use of iron might have been necessary on the doors of a fort, if only because the doors would be opened and closed often, thus necessitating a sturdier and longer-lasting material than wood. Additionally, although difficult to discern in the photograph, the doors are perforated by more than 200 closely spaced hand-forged iron spikes, or large nails, and the entire Zaguán once held as many as 500 of these spikes. Clearly, this additional prolific use of iron was not necessary for structural integrity since other portones/puertones were constructed without metal. However, the embedded spikes might have been considered a useful addition to the basic defensive purpose that all portones provide, especially if the doors were installed in a military fort. The smaller wicket door that's incorporated into one of the larger doors further supports the fort hypothesis due to its larger-than-average size. Unlike the portones/puertones, which would be opened only to allow access by wagons or animals, the wicket door was



used for routine pedestrian access. The larger size of the wicket door in this case may have been to accommodate a greater frequency of pedestrian traffic.

By 1970, the Zaguán and its large doors were at risk of demolition along with the rest of the Horace Long house, which had deteriorated beyond repair. It was then that Alan Minge acquired the structure and installed it at Casa San Ysidro. Alan is said to have tested the height of the Zaguán by having a neighbor ride through on horseback wearing a sombrero, thus demonstrating that the structure conformed with traditional dimensions.

The adobe horno (or beehive oven) in this photo was constructed for Alan Minge by his Acoma friends Joe and Rose Ray. Although hornos are a truly iconic part of Southwestern culture, proliferating throughout Pueblo communities, the basic design was introduced to natives by Spanish-Colonial settlers. Coincidentally, however, that basic design may be as old as Pueblo culture itself, originating with the Moors who occupied Spain for 900 years prior to their expulsion in 1492. Today, hornos are an important part of Pueblo life, both for routine use in daily food preparation and for ceremonial purposes, especially on Feast Days. According to Puebloan tradition, some foods can only be prepared in an horno while other foods must never be prepared in an horno. At Casa San Ysidro, another horno (not shown here) is routinely used during Harvest Festival and on Heritage Day. During those events, a Pueblo baker demonstrates traditional techniques and prepares breads, pastries, and cookies for visitors.