

the path to greatness

how sleepy little Camino del Cañon became a world-class arts destination

The street known as “The Art and Soul of Santa Fe” returns to its pleinairist roots, 10 AM to 3 PM on October 18, with the first-ever Historic Canyon Road Paint Out and Festival. Gathering artists such as Roseta Santiago, Chuck Volz, and Erin Rosen to paint outdoors, the event re-embodies the legendary spirit of the unassuming artistic mecca. At a 10 AM opening reception at Giacobbe Fritz Fine Art (702 Canyon), Mayor David Coss dedicates the day as Historic Canyon Road Day.



COURTESY SILVER SUN

Canyon Road in 1967. Just in front of the white car is the former Claude’s restaurant and bar, which now houses Tresa Vorenberg Goldsmiths and Silver Sun gallery.

“I USED TO WALK THIS STREET and think something might happen here,” says Andrea “Drew” Bacigalupa, 85, an artist who bought his house at 626 Canyon Road for \$10,000 in 1956. “I don’t think of myself as too practical, but it was an intelligent thing to do.”

When he and Ellen arrived, just a handful of artists lived and worked out of studios nearby. Today, more than 100 galleries line Canyon Road, providing Santa Fe with 2,500 jobs and \$54 million in annual tax revenue. In 50 years, the sleepy little road—called El Camino del Cañon until 1951—morphed into the epicenter of one of the country’s largest art markets. With dealers representing work from classic New Mexican artists to that of international contemporary artists, modern Canyon Road keeps a high profile.

But despite the street’s now-iconic status, the area’s development was a slow, organic process that happened later than might have been expected. By 1962 in New York, Andy Warhol had already received his first solo exhibition, and contemporary art was on the rise. Meanwhile, Santa Fe’s reputation was inching forward. It wasn’t until the ’70s and ’80s that gallerists and artists alike began settling along the curvy lane with paintbrushes and canvases in hand, although it could be argued that Canyon’s creative ascendancy began as early as 1915: Gerald Cassidy, a painter of Southwestern landscapes and Native American portraits, was reportedly the first artist to buy a house on Canyon Road, and in 1920,

painter Randall Davey bought a large tract of land at the end of Upper Canyon, prompting established artists from across the country to start taking the Santa Fe arts community seriously. But as late as 1947 the city still supported only two galleries. It took 15 more years for Santa Fe to officially recognize the pastoral lane as a “Residential Arts and Crafts Zone”—not that the residents cared much about recognition. But art dealers did: By 1964 it was home to three-quarters of Santa Fe’s 12 galleries.

“What was wonderful about this time period,” says Marilyn Bane, a 15-year resident of Canyon Road and the president of The Old Santa Fe Association, “was that artists lived, worked, and showed their stuff in their own houses, which is a very different environment than today.”

Claude’s, a restaurant and bar at 656 Canyon, opened in 1956 and was frequented by artists as well as the well-heeled and various eccentrics. In 1965, it was appraised at \$74,000, pricey for the time period, a sign that Canyon Road was truly on the upswing. Stories abound about the once-famous haunt before it closed in 1972, including tales of raucous fights and prostitution. “Canyon Road was dirt then, and not at all the arts-and-crafts center it is today,” the late owner, Claude James, told the *Santa Fe Reporter* in 1975. “We may very well



COURTESY PALACE OF THE GOVERNORS (IMM/DCA), #01125

Photographed from Atalaya Hill circa 1920, Upper Canyon Road was largely bare.

have been the first of the bohemian businesses in the neighborhood, and that didn’t hurt business, either.”

Canyon Road’s transformation gained momentum in the ’70s when, as Bacigalupa says, “The hippies arrived. They came from Haight-Ashbury and built enterprising little adobes. With them came a lot of influence from California. Until then, most visitors were from Texas or Colorado.” In 1978, Linda Durham, a self-described hippie and former Playboy bunny from New York, opened Linda Durham Contemporary at 400 Canyon, the road’s first gallery to focus on contemporary and abstract art. “We had lots of openings with all kinds of people eating and drinking and smoking and carousing outside,” Durham says of her 1980s-era venue, which has since moved to Paseo de Peralta.

As the ’80s came to a close, Mark Zaplin and Richard Lampert, two young dealers from Massachusetts, opened the Zaplin Lampert gallery at 651 Canyon in 1987 and established themselves as a source for Western artists and photographers, offering posthumous work by the likes of Edward Curtis and Albert Bierstadt. “There were about 15 galleries and a couple of restaurants, like Ernie’s and the Haven,” says Lampert. “It was more selective, much quieter, and less hectic than the Plaza. People

would go to the Plaza and the pueblos or Taos, but we were missed. Now people come here first.”

By then, Canyon possessed a strange dichotomy: Painters like Bierstadt, a German-American who created large, luminous Western landscapes, had far-reaching ties to artist groups like the Hudson River School, which brought prestige and collectors. Yet Canyon was still teeming with fields of wildflowers and roaming coyotes. “My art history professors at Chapel Hill laughed at me for moving here,” says Tonya Turner Carroll, who opened Turner Carroll Gallery with now-husband Michael Carroll at No. 725. When they were in their early 20s, in 1991, she says, “We were on our way out to California to pursue more serious art. But we had an opportunity to open a gallery on Canyon Road and had this romantic, idealistic notion to show only art we loved and believed in.”

The gamble paid off. The gallery’s collector list has since grown to more than 10,000, many of whom fly in from all over the world to attend openings for artists like Oakland-based painter Hung Liu. “I love showing contemporary art against these historic buildings,” says Turner Carroll. “It emphasizes the timelessness of what we do. It’s not trend or hype. It’s serious art”—Stephanie Pearson **Sf**

Artist Randall Davey in his Upper Canyon Road studio, now the Randall Davey Audubon Center, circa 1950



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