The Swan House and Adobe Construction Lab
Sales Presentation

Presidio, Texas
Big Bend Country, reachable by scenic route only.

- 500 Acres
- 2,000 sq. ft. house
- 360° views
- Adjacent to Big Bend State Park
- Solar and Wind Powered
- Agricultural Tax Exemption
- Spring-fed Well
The Swan house was built in 1998 on a mesa overlooking Terneros Creek and just a mile and a half above the Rio Grande River that divides, as well as unites, Mexico and Texas. It was constructed out of unstabilized adobe bricks by project manager Jesusita Jimenez and builder Mauro Rodriguez, plus occasional men hired to mix mortar, install scaffolding and heft mortar and bricks. Simone Swan is the designer and overseer, civil engineer David Pobst lent a paternal eye and hand, when queried. Roofs, made of smaller adobe bricks, are in the configuration of vaults and one dome, plus a flat roof serves as observation deck for stargazing and as sleeping porch above a great hall 16 feet high.

The floor plan is designed in the form of an H forming two patios oriented one to the west, the other to the east. It has a public wing and a private wing with a great hall forming the link between the two parts. On the north side are two bedrooms and two bathrooms, each with a large closet. A shower outside, 10 ft away, has hot running water. The great hall which transepts the house leads to a kitchen-dining area on one side, the living room on the other. Meals with superb views can be enjoyed in either patio and on the south side of the house that is shaded by a ramada, or overhang, of ocotillo cacti from the property. Square footage is 2,000 with the outbuildings of a guestroom, domed, and two vaulted sheds, one for the solar equipment and tools, the other sheltering a large water tank.

The river attracts a variety of superb birds, fish and animals at liberty. To the south stand eight majestic tiers of Mexican Sierra whose highest range, Sierra Rica, reaches 8,000 feet, visible from the swan house mesa. Eastward one sees forever to a horizon where the abrupt mountains of the Big Bend National Park rise. To the west rise the distant Mexican Sierra Mata Agua which at dawn is aflame with red, pink and orange light cast by the rising sun; the rest of the day it is pure grey shale, with vertical seams from erosion. Northward is the fringe of the Chihuahuan desert and the Chinati range over 7,700 feet high. The dirt road which runs through the property is maintained by the county, the house stands just 1.5 miles from the paved River Road, or farm road 170 east.
The well for the property is cited in historic documents. It is only 10 ft. deep at the edge of the arroyo because it is fed by a spring, which yields about 6,000 gallons a day. A solar pump delivers water 750 feet to the house, with a loft of 125 feet.

The 500 acres on which the house is built benefit from agricultural tax-exemption in the category of wilderness protection. This implies providing water for animals at the well below the house in the flood plain, and bird feeders in three places. Indian tobacco plants attract and feed humming birds, and the environment below in the draw offers food and shelter for deer and coyote, javelina and birds: owls, quail, and a variety of doves, the cactus wren, the road runner, the red-tailed hawk and more.

In February-March the entire desert is in bloom: yucca, creosote, bluebonnet, small unidentified purple and yellow ground cover, white daisies, yellow daisies, fragrant bi-colored mustard and much more. The Indian tobacco flowers all year. Also fragrant in the draw are the mesquite, Texas willow and seep willow blossoms.
The unpaved road that crosses the property at a good distance from the house belongs to the owner but is maintained by the county. It leads to Marfa 60 miles to the north, and to the Big Bend ranch State Park to the east. Traffic is rare: an estimated average of 6-8 vehicles a day, except when the Ranch holds an event for horse lovers and cattle rounders. Part of this property abuts to the immense Ranch. The Parks & Wildlife staff is most friendly to Swan House. Border Patrol officers have been unobtrusive and the Sheriff’s staff has helped when needed.

There is room for an airstrip along the north fence line. Walking trails of great variety could be bladed but Simone has mainly followed the narrow trails of animals, or the road along fences, and the arroyo for hikes during which one is totally isolated from any ambient sound except for the occasional weekly jet. An hour’s walk away in the draw stand huge, ancient cottonwood trees whose roots seem to be in water. A chupadero (wetlands) there allows sheets of water to spread nearby. Simone’s land ends a few hundred feet from the trees.

Total annual taxes for land and structure are around $800 a year. Deed restrictions include no paved roads, no lighting, no waste disposal and indigenous plants only.

One neighbor is Daniel Estrada who cultivates alfalfa along the Rio Grande to the south. As one descends the mesa on the unpaved road, the sight of his green fields presents a true oasis. A mile to the north is a 3,000 square foot private adobe house which Simone designed and built.
Casa Piedra Road leading to the house

Exterior

Sunset view

Exterior
View to the north.

Southern view to Mexico

Garden with yuccas and an allee of agave

Domed guest house
Bedroom with adobe bed

Bedroom with adobe bed

Living room with built-in adobe couch

The Great Hall
Lecture circle

Building an arch

Jesusita Jimenez plastering vaulted ceiling

Constructing a dome

Sealing a dome

Efran Rodriguez-Adobe master, Simone Swan-Owner and Stevan de la Rosa-Instructor
Plan of Swan Compound
(top faces north.)