

By Karen Flake Werner
Photography by Roger Wade

HERE COMES THE SUN

WILLIAM OTWELL IS ANIMATED about adobe. His grandfather's dairy farm was made from it, and his uncles built an adobe house in Phoenix that still stands today. But it's more than family ties that has drawn the Prescott architect to the material.

Ask what he loves about adobe, and Otwell's list is long: the texture, the acoustics, the thickness of the walls. "It's hard, and it doesn't rub off, yet it's porous," he says. "You get a variation that's almost like some of the Venetian finishes."

COUPLE ADOBE'S INHERENT
APPEAL WITH OTWELL'S
PENCHANT FOR PASSIVE SOLAR
DESIGN, AND YOU'LL GET THIS
MODERN PUEBLO ADOBE.

Still, the appeal of these sun-dried, unfired bricks goes beyond the aesthetic. Dug from the earth and amended with little more than water and sun, adobe was "green" long before the term was coined. In fact, Native Americans have been building with it for centuries. In this bulldozer approach to home heating, the sun warms the adobe, which stores heat and slowly radiates it. "You don't get much fluctuation from day to night," Otwell says. "The long-term energy savings from the thermal mass are wonderful."



