

New Mexicans to Know: It's all about sustainability for Heidi Steele of Surface Resources



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EPIPHANY STUDIO



By [Meagan Nichols](#) – Editor-in-chief, Albuquerque Business First
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More than 30 years ago, [Heidi Steele](#) was living in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Her boyfriend at the time came from a family with deep Santa Fe roots, so they made a few visits out West. New Mexico lived up to its Land of Enchantment billing. Steele was hooked.

“I just fell in love with it. It just felt like home in a way that no place I’d ever been had felt before,” she said. “So right after college, I loaded up my van and moved out.”

Three decades later and the New Mexico spell hasn’t faded. She’s called the village of Cerrillos home for essentially all of that time.

With its Wild West charm and “rural unspoiled character” Steele was captivated by the tiny village.

“It's an opportunity I couldn't pass up to be a bigger part of history and a piece of New Mexican culture,” Steele said about living in Cerrillos.

It's also proved to be the perfect place for someone entrenched in architecture and design. Steele is the founder of Surface Resources, which is focused on providing sustainable interior design materials. Founded in 2010, her territory covers Arizona, New Mexico, Utah and West Texas.

Albuquerque Business First recently caught up with Steele to talk to her about both her personal and professional life.

The interview was edited for brevity and clarity.

Albuquerque Business First: When you aren't working, what are some of your favorite things to do?

Heidi Steele: I have two major pastimes and they devour every moment that I'm not at work. I spent many years as a professional architect and interior designer prior to founding Surface Resources, and my husband is a custom builder. So, we make a great team. Being located in a historic village, restoring historic properties where we reside is our absolute favorite pastime. Our current restoration is a two-level adobe pharmacy that was built in 1890, and we're currently converting it into a luxury residence. ... Because we're restoring properties, we're developing these historic properties, they all need to be landscaped. My other favorite pastime is gardening. I've never formally studied gardening, but I've definitely earned master gardener status from decades of real-world experience. ... I am personally most proud of the fact that they are now, with the exception of the pharmacy, fully mature, 100% indigenous landscapes that thrive without irrigation.

Prior to founding Surface Resources where were you working? I was actually self-employed. I had a small, but very much thriving, firm based in Santa Fe. We focused on five-star resorts and some residential. The reason I founded Surface Resources was because I always struggled to find sustainable finished materials. ... When you could find them, there was no local representation. You had to rely on reps or distributors from Chicago, L.A., New York, and they knew that they were never going to have a long-term relationship with you. They just charged you these egregious prices.

Oftentimes, even though you were paying top dollar, the availability of the products just wasn't even there.... When the Great Recession hit, I thought, you know what? This is my opportunity right here to change my career and to bring high-quality, sustainable materials to the greater Southwest. So that's what I did.

Why is that so important to you, to bring that sustainability piece? I really place such value on personal well-being, healthy spaces that promote personal well-being, peace of mind. I think that's what you get when you choose to build with sustainable materials.

Are you feeling the supply chain issues right now? We are literally just beginning to feel some constraints from our partners. The constraints that we have felt over the last three years, interestingly enough, have had nothing to do with the pandemic or the fallout post-pandemic world. Our biggest struggle has been that our manufacturing partners have been so successful that over half of them have needed to relocate into significantly larger manufacturing facilities. ... For me, it's always been about material availability. I've very carefully scrutinized each manufacturer before I decided to establish a relationship with them to make sure that they had solid distribution channels in place.

What's your favorite part about your job? Hitting the road to explore new places and meet new people. Without a doubt, the friendships that I have forged in the name of work are my proudest accomplishments.