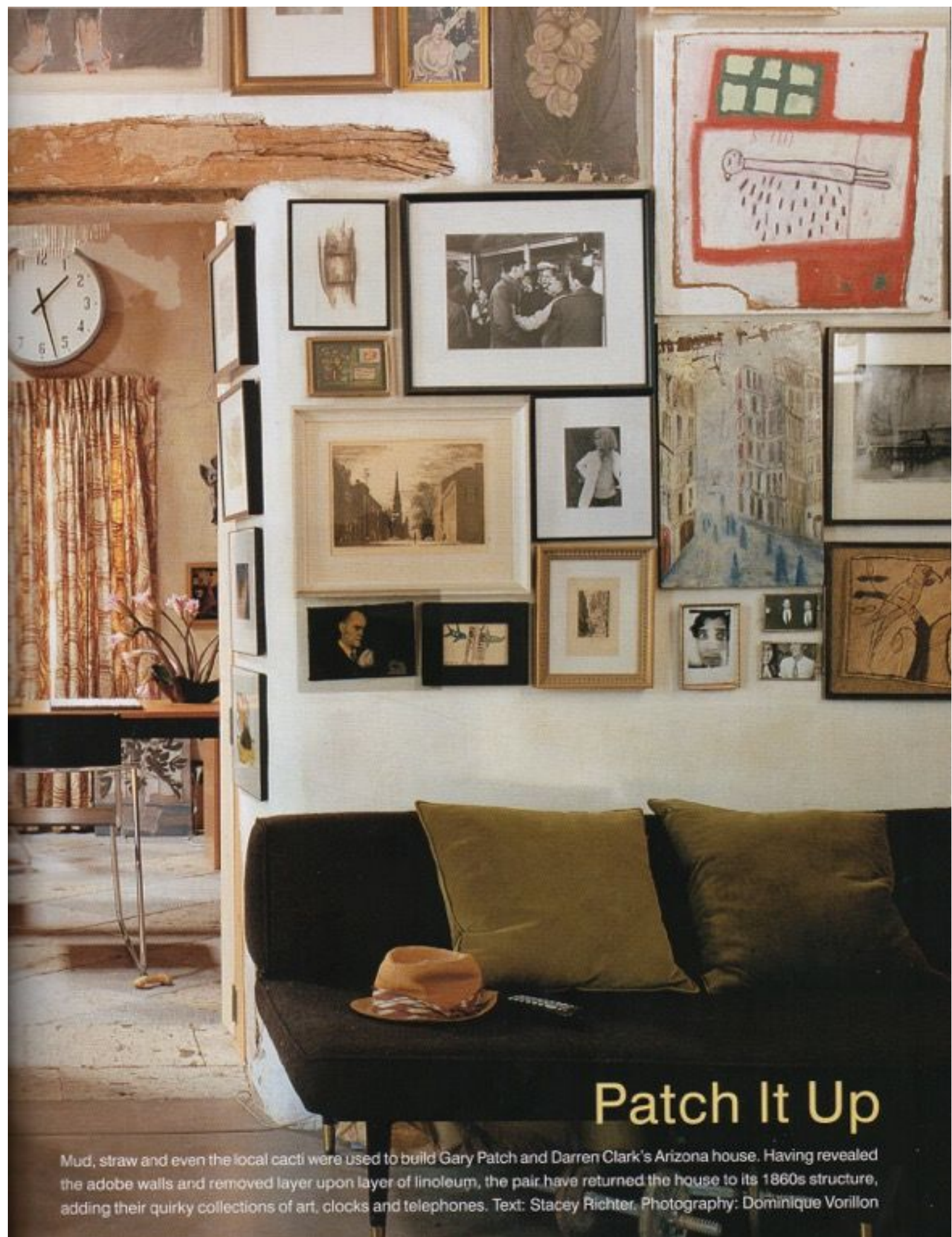


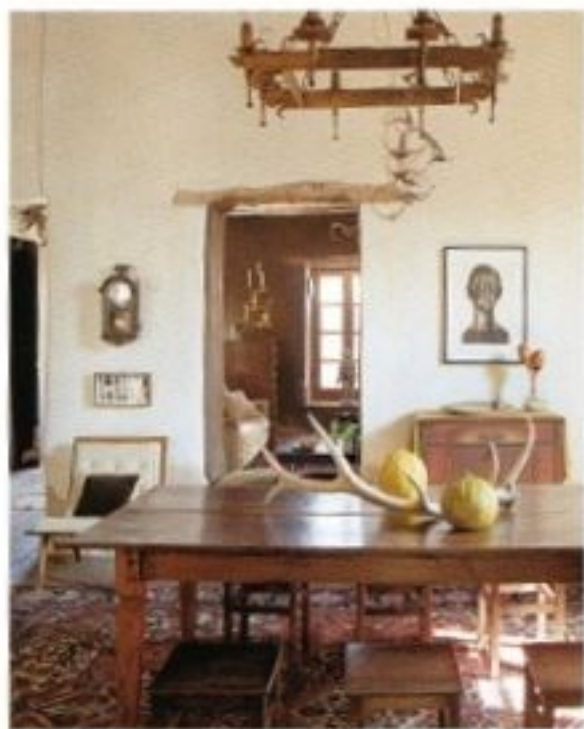


PHOTOGRAPHS AND PAINTINGS, MOSTLY BY PATCH AND CLARK'S FRIENDS, HANG FRAME TO FRAME ON THE WALLS OF THE LIVING ROOM

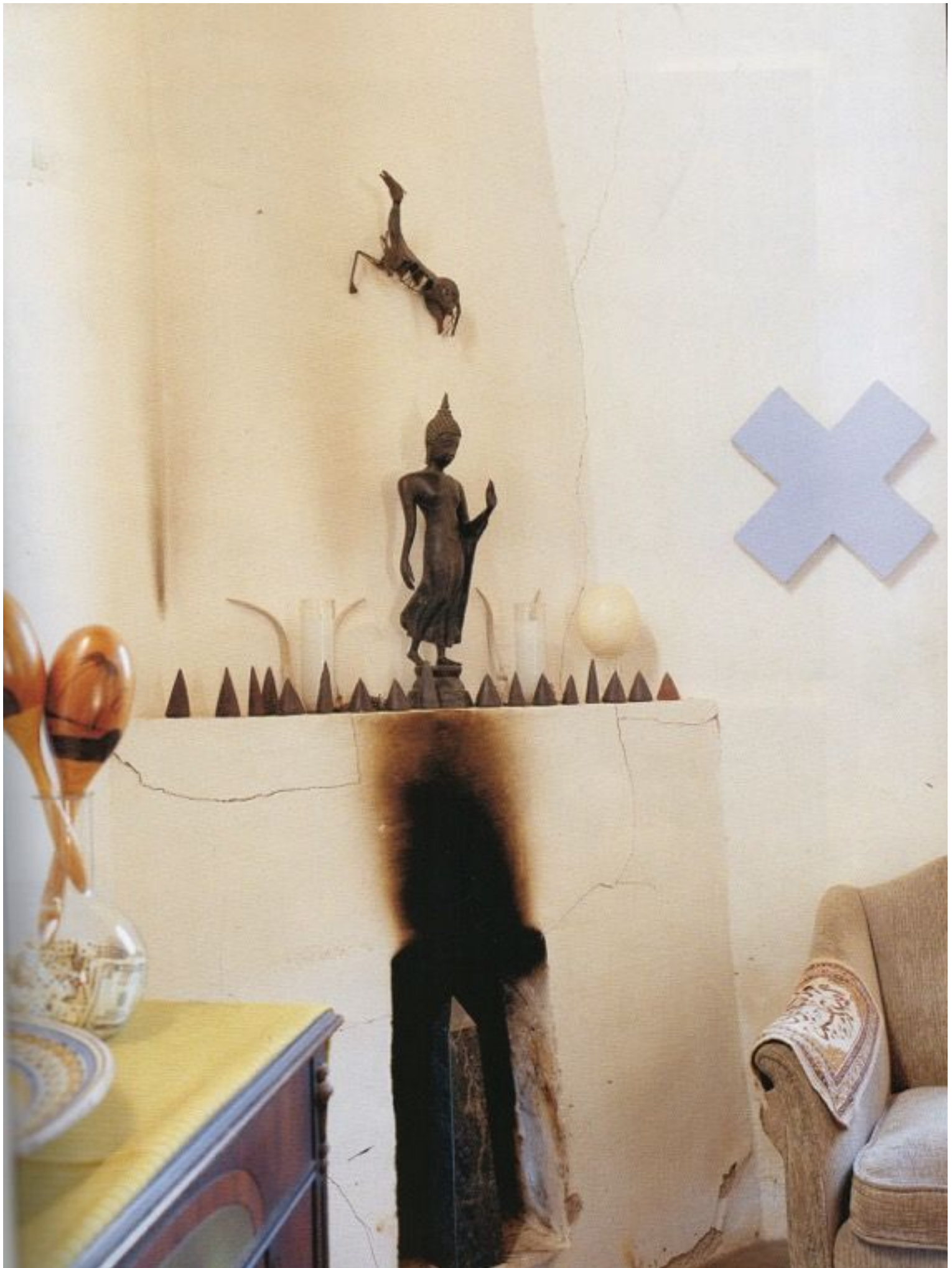


Patch It Up

Mud, straw and even the local cacti were used to build Gary Patch and Darren Clark's Arizona house. Having revealed the adobe walls and removed layer upon layer of linoleum, the pair have returned the house to its 1860s structure, adding their quirky collections of art, clocks and telephones. Text: Stacey Richter. Photography: Dominique Vorillon



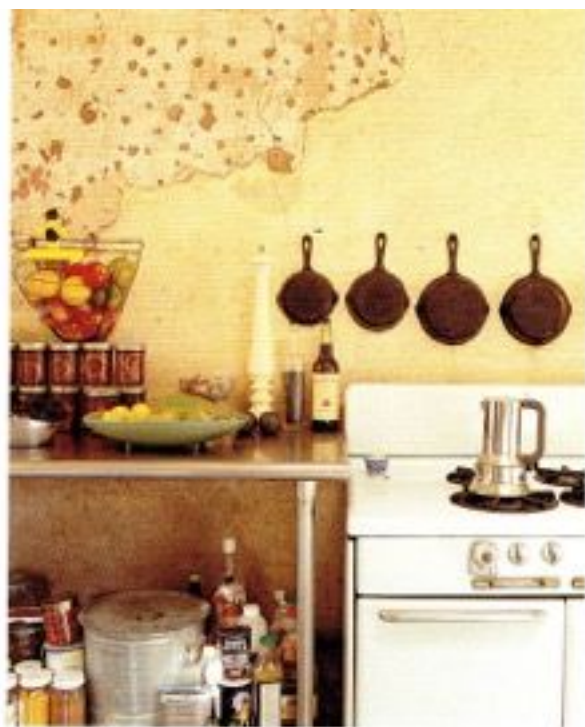
THIS PAGE, TOP: THE DINING ROOM FEATURES A PAINTING BY MATT COTTEN AND AN APPLE PHOTOGRAPH BY ADAM LICHT. THE TABLE IS MADE FROM INDOONESIAN TEAK FLOORBOARDS. ABOVE LEFT: THE LIVING ROOM WALLS HAVE BEEN STRIPPED TO THEIR ORIGINAL ADOBE. SKYLIGHTS WERE ADDED DURING RENOVATION. ABOVE RIGHT: MESQUITE BEAMS HEAD THE DOORS. THE WOODCUT IS BY LEONARD BASKIN. OPPOSITE: THE 'X' PAINTING IS BY OLIVIER MOSSET. ON THE MANTELPIECE ARE CONICAL RICE-PLANTING TOOLS FROM LAOS





THIS PAGE, TOP: AN ETCHING BY CLEMENT HAUPERS AND AN OLD PRINT OF NUESTRA SENORA DE GUADALUPE HANG ABOVE THE FIREPLACE IN THE BEDROOM. ABOVE LEFT: LOOSE MEXICAN BEACH PEBBLES PROVIDE A FLOOR FOR THE SHOWER IN THE BATHROOM. THE SHOWER HEAD IS SET DIRECTLY INTO THE SKYLIGHT. ABOVE RIGHT: OX-EYE WINDOWS HAVE BEEN ADDED TO LET MORE LIGHT INTO THE SPACE. OPPOSITE: THE LIBRARY/OFFICE HAS SHELVES MADE FROM RECYCLED PINE AND A FLOOR OF CANTERRA STONE FROM MEXICO





WHEN GARY PATCH and Darren Clark decided to buy a neighbour's run-down terrace house in Tucson, Arizona, they had no idea that the renovation would take eight years and leave them, at times, without a roof over their heads. 'We could lie in bed and look up at the stars,' Clark says. 'If it rained, we just strung up a plastic sheet.'

It's this kind of improvisational spirit that guided the renovation and furnishing of the 19th-century house, which was built with adobe bricks made of straw and mud – the most abundant building materials in Arizona in the 1860s, when this region of the desert was still untouched by the railway. Wood had to be hauled from nearby mountains and hewn into beams called vigas; these were so difficult to obtain that they were handed down through the generations. A series of vigas stretch across the 14ft-high ceiling of the house, supporting rows of ribs harvested from saguaro, the local cacti. The adobe walls are 2ft thick and lend a wonderful, warm quality to the house, muffling sound and filtering light. 'This style of architecture stretches all the way from north Africa, through Mexico and up into the southwestern United States,' says Patch.

Adobe may have been popular in 19th-century Tucson, but a different trend is evident in the sprawling suburbs and cookie-cutter housing developments now spreading across the surrounding desert at an alarming rate. 'We wanted to live someplace with history and richness,' says Patch, referring to his small, historically Latino neighbourhood – long considered a slum, now highly prized.

When Patch and Clark first bought the house, it had been neglected for years. 'We could tell that it had beautiful lines,' says Patch, 'but it had been divided into a duplex and fallen into disrepair. Everything was held together with duct tape.' The two set about removing decades' worth of dubious improvements. Patch, an interior designer who settled in Tucson on a whim (a fight with a friend inspired

him to board the first bus leaving town; his life savings took him as far as Tucson), and Clark, a filmmaker known for his provocative style, did almost all of the work themselves. They also lived in the house during the entire process. 'Initially it was still a duplex, so we lived on one side and worked on the other. One side would be a tragedy, and on the other we were having cocktail parties.'

As the first order of business, they had to remove several breeze-block additions and peel a shell of concrete off the adobe walls. 'Concrete is fatal to adobe,' Patch says, 'the mud bricks sit directly on the ground and absorb moisture. They need to breathe or they crumble.' They also discovered a sheet of concrete poured over the original wood floors, which were buried under a mulch of materials. 'It was like we were archaeologists,' says Patch. 'You could see all the styles of flooring from the Nineties back to the 1860s – there was carpet laid over vinyl tiles laid over layer after layer of linoleum. We could date each section exactly because they were separated by sheets of newspaper.'

The walls yielded a similar time-capsule of paint and Victorian wallpaper, until they were finally stripped down to their original (and now quite pocked) plaster. Patch and Clark replastered several of the rooms but simply sealed the cracked surface in others. After the rotted floorboards were removed, the couple filled the house with four inches of gravel to act as a base for a new floor. But they liked the gravel so much that they moved their furniture onto it and lived with it that way for two years. ('We cleaned up with a rake,' quips Patch.) There's no ductwork in the house and no source of heat except for the fireplaces. The adobe absorbs water and tends to leak dust. 'It's not for everyone,' Clark says, 'but I love it. This house is alive.'

Even now that the roof is back on, the gravel is safely buried beneath concrete and tile, and the renovation is mostly done, the house remains in tune with nature. The adobe walls lend an appealing earthiness and a striking backdrop for Patch's and Clark's collections of art, antiques, books, and things. 'I'm obsessed with clocks,' says Clark. 'There are clocks on the walls, clocks in the attic, and clocks under the bed.' He also collects telephones, which perch between thrift-store chairs reupholstered with Isaac Mizrahi fabric, a stuffed armadillo, and a giant whale vertebra discovered on a porch on the Mexican coast. 'We've gone driving across the US looking for antiques and interesting things,' says Patch. Their eclectic haul ranges from delicate chandeliers to a squat toilet carried home from Thailand.

One thing they didn't have to look far for is the artwork hanging, frame to frame, on the walls. 'A lot of our friends are artists, and most of the work we have is by people we know.' There are also pieces they made themselves: the living room holds Patch's bold portrait of a friend at the Eiffel tower and Clark's photomontage of fruit, part of his series *Messages to the Aliens*. Apples and oranges spell out a sentence in Morse code, striking a plaintive note in this organic house built to be in tune with a landscape now disappearing beneath the relentless development of the American West: 'We are eating our own refuse. Please send help' ■ Gary Patch and Darren Clark can be contacted on 001 520629 9556

THIS PAGE: CAST-IRON PANS HANG IN A LINE ABOVE THE COOKER. OPPOSITE: THE KITCHEN WALL WAS PREVIOUSLY AN EXTERIOR ONE

