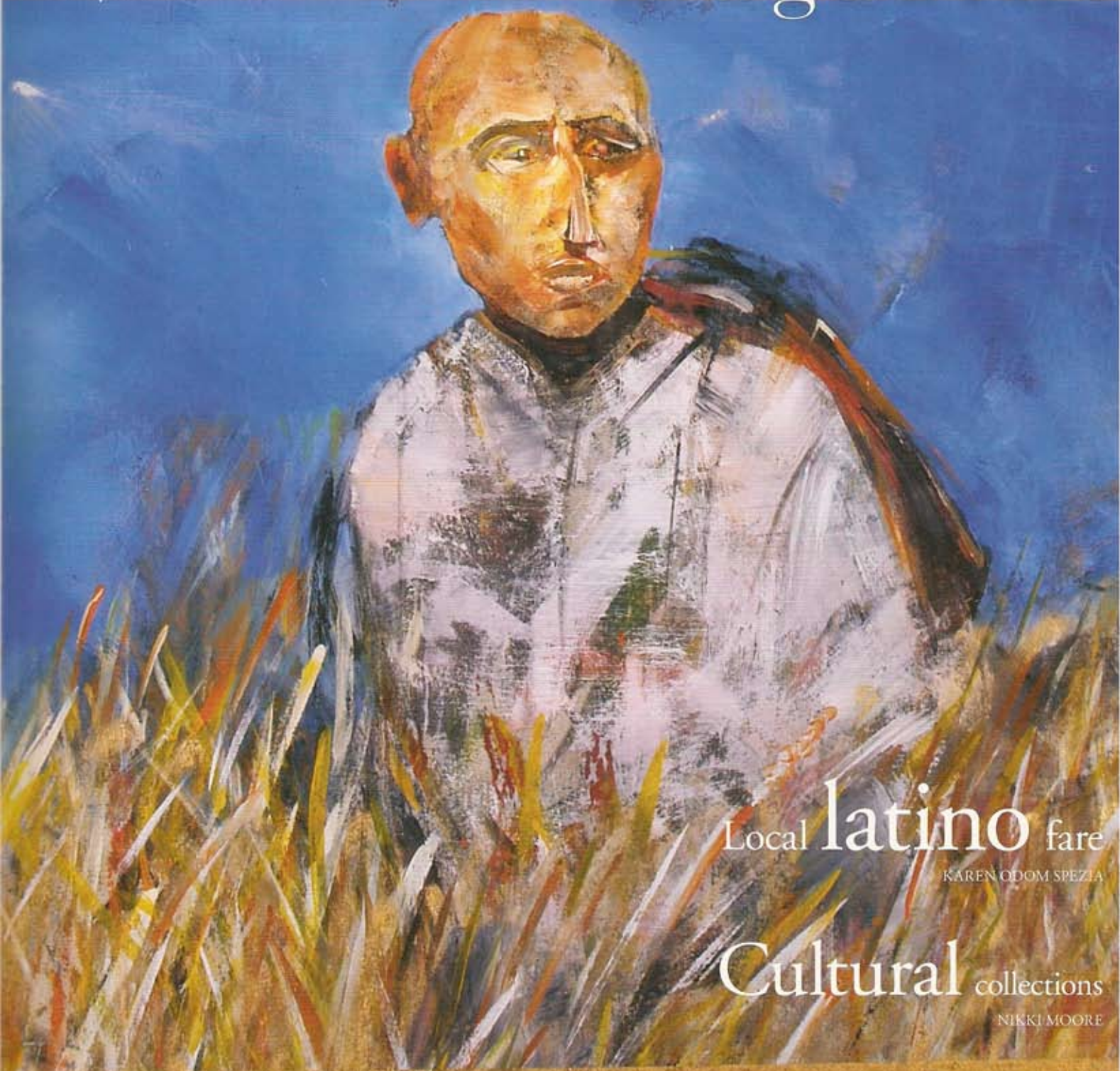


AUSTIN

magazine

issue 4 september/october 2006



Local **latino** fare

KAREN ODOM SPEZIA

Cultural collections

NIKKI MOORE

South of the **Border**

PHOTO ESSAY



A Strong Foundation

Raul, Erik, Jair, and Alan Gonzalez / Sago International

story AUTUMN RHEA CARPENTER
photography LESLEY NOWLIN

As the Latino culture continues to thrive within the United States, and especially Texas, elements of its architecture, art, and design influence our residential and corporate landscape. The design/build company of Sago International offers Austin a taste of Mexican culture with its modern, sleek designs that are deeply rooted in the country's rich history.

Raul Gonzalez, owner of Sago International, formed the architecture and building company in Austin more than 23 years ago. "My wife and I moved here from Mexico City, and the natural transition would have been to move to San Antonio," he said. "But after a 24-hour visit to Austin and an additional three days, I found the home that we still live in today."

According to Raul, a home holds different meanings in Mexico and in the United States. "In the Hispanic culture a home is built with the idea that it will stand forever," he said. "The structure holds a lifetime of memories as well as several generations. For some in the United States, the home still represents a place of stability and endurance, but it is also a monetary investment that can easily be sold."

facing page • it's a family affair for sago international, a design/build family-owned business that primarily specializes in the design of modern architectural homes.

Another difference between the two countries is the concept of commuting. "Most people who live in a particular town in Mexico do not drive to another town for employment," said Raul. "People live where they work. This might account for their stronger attachment to the home."

Raul compares his work to that of a custom tailor. "A good tailor measures the body and matches a suit exactly to that body's measurements," he said. "All bodies are similar, yet differ both physically and psychologically. The same concept applies to a house, in that it grows and changes with the evolution of a family. If we are able to understand these considerations, we can create a home that fits a family perfectly."

Raul feels Texans often have misconceptions regarding true Mexican design. "Many people visit Mexico's border towns and get a comic representation of our country," he said. "We do love bright, airy colors, but use them tastefully. Mexico is well known for its modern design approaches."

Raul's three architect sons, Erik, Jair, and Alan, make up the rest of the Sago International team. The brothers defined the company's modern design approach and their outlook on the process. "We bring an efficient, functional, modern style to our projects, but strive to integrate the exterior with the interior and to incorporate the light and the positive and negative space. While our designs are modern, they are traditional in terms of open spaces and light," said Erik.

Sago International's designs have appeared in a variety of forms, including commercial, residential, and retail. Whether the project is a home or a more complex facility, the initial stages of the design process include several informational meetings to learn about the client's expectations and lifestyle. "We usually form long-term relationships with our clients that endure after the project's completion," said Jair. "It is important that we understand the client's goals for the structure,

including their interests, how they plan to utilize the space, and their vision. It is difficult to learn all of those answers in one meeting."

Each Gonzalez son brings his own talent to the family-owned company. Jair spent eight years working in high-end New York projects with unlimited budgets and offers an eye for design to the group. Erik understands structures through extensive commercial experience, and Alan complements the team with his analytical and conceptual views.

Several architects and designers influence the Gonzalez men's work, including Luis Barragan, Ricardo Legorreta, and Enrique De La Mora. "I admire Legorreta for his use of color and

volume, and Barragan for his mastery of space and light," said Erik. Raul added, "I respect De La Mora for his masterful work on museums and churches."

"People might want to hear that since we are a family, there is conflict and many heated discussions," said Jair. "In truth, we all bring our own value to the team and we respect each other's experiences. There is

always a project leader, and ultimately that person guides the job. We work well together, and it shows."

As Austin evolves and an understanding for architecture and design increases, the need for more qualified design/build experience grows. "There is a local movement for more functional, beautiful design," said Erik. "Our international perspective, from European studies and Mexican backgrounds, adds another layer to our work, and we are able to provide our clients with unique ideas for the same cost."

When asked what they miss about Mexico and love about Austin, they collectively answer, "We miss our family and tacos. But Austin makes up for that in its tranquil outdoors, creative freedoms, and the spirit of the people."

To learn more about Sago International, visit www.sagointernational.com or call 512.472.9996. | AC

"IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE UNDERSTAND THE CLIENT'S GOALS FOR THE STRUCTURE, INCLUDING THEIR INTERESTS, HOW THEY PLAN TO UTILIZE THE SPACE, AND THEIR VISION. IT IS DIFFICULT TO LEARN ALL OF THOSE ANSWERS IN ONE MEETING."