

BOOK IT: **59** GREAT READS TAKE YOU THERE

FEBRUARY 2010

# New Mexico

MAGAZINE

FOLLOW US TO  
**HILLERMAN  
COUNTRY**

PASSIONATE PAIRS:  
**LEGENDARY  
LOVE STORIES**

RECIPES FOR YOUR  
**BOOK CIRCLE  
TEA TIME**

DESERT ESCAPE:  
**SADDLE UP  
DOWN SOUTH**



FEBRUARY 2010 | \$4.95 USA  
[www.nmmagazine.com](http://www.nmmagazine.com)



0 09128 47858 6



# Going Places

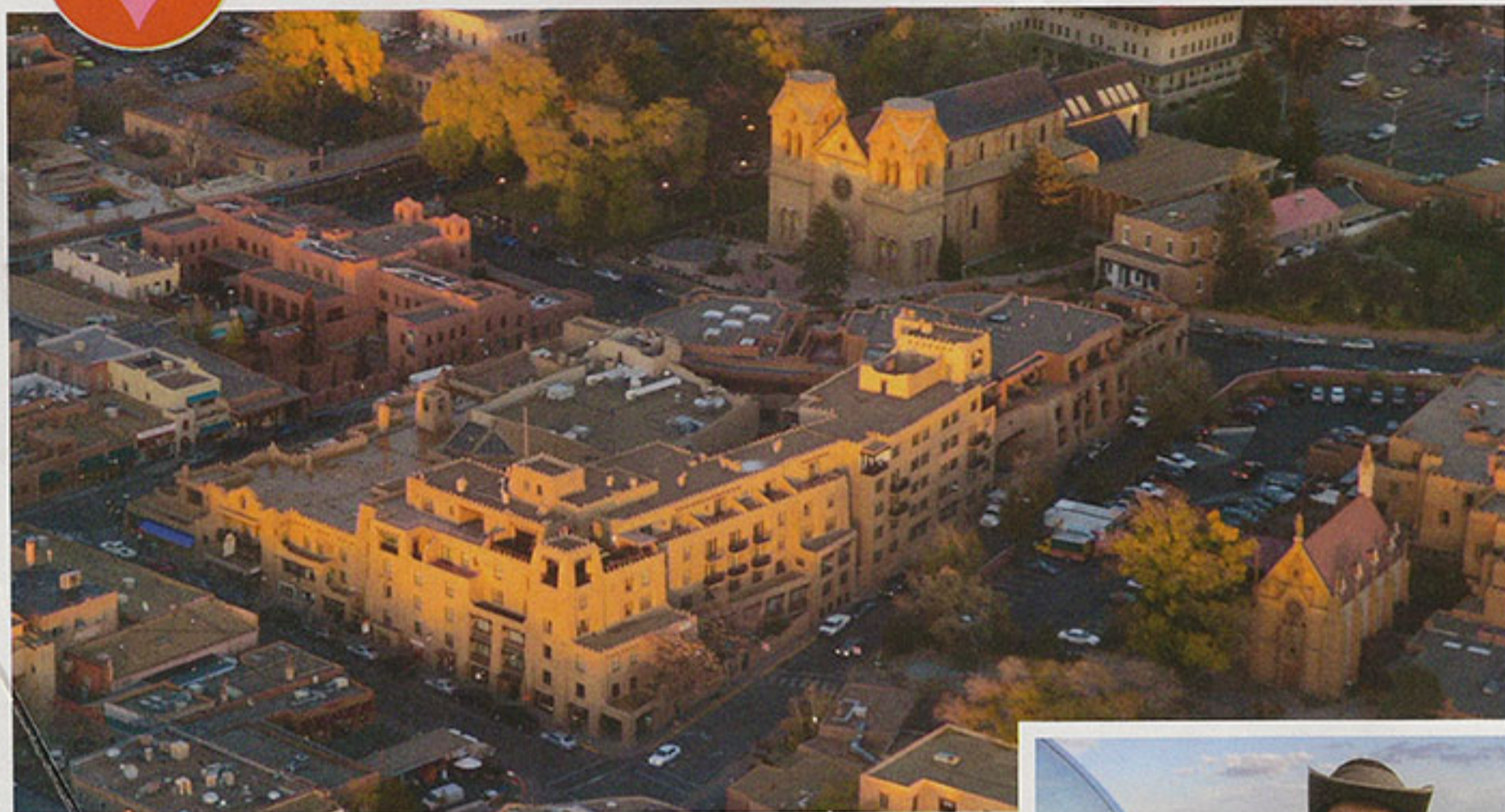
■ OUTINGS ■ SHOPPING ■ DINING ■ LODGING ■ PEOPLE

## Scout it Out

Santa Fe-based Gryphon Helicopter's charted tours often encounter the unexpected. A flight over the Galisteo Basin spotted this period movie set. Says pilot Joaquin Brandi: "We often come across unusual and fun stuff like this when I am teaching students or giving tours." Excursions include sky tours over La Cienega and El Rancho de las Golondrinas Living History Museum, the city of Santa Fe, the Ortiz Mountains, and the Rio Grande Gorge. Read more on page 10.

PHOTO BY JOAQUIN BRANDI





THE GOOD LIFE: **SANTA FE**

## Above It All

**INSTEAD OF HEADING OUT** of town for a much-longed-for escape, my companion and I are taking to the skies.

Minutes after we arrive at the helipad of the Santa Fe Municipal Airport, Gryphon Helicopter pilot Joaquin Brandi has confidently ensconced us in his craft. The Bell 47—the first helicopter certified for non-military use—has a clear, bulbous cabin, and an Erector Set–like tail that gives it the appearance of a 40-foot dragonfly.

But there's little time to ponder our vessel—its propeller blades have already begun to beat the air in the arduous rhythm of a large bird's wings as it tries to get airborne. Then, suddenly, the whir is steady, and we rise, tipping forward slightly as we fly toward the Sangre de Cristo Mountains on a circular tour over the City Different.

Having taken off from an altitude of nearly 7,000 feet, we now climb several hundred more. The air smells moist—our proximity to the clouds in the azure sky has made the fragrance all the more tangible. Our Bell 47 has no doors, so the wind

whips through the cabin as we cruise at 75 miles per hour in our airborne convertible.

From my vantage point in the middle seat of the cabin, which has room enough only for the pilot and two passengers, I take in unimpeded views of our surroundings. Below us emerge the iconic sites of Santa Fe—the Loretto Chapel, the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, the Plaza. Here, the bustle of the city feels far removed.

Brandi shows us some gems hidden among the foothills. In fact, having the freedom to explore New Mexico from the air, seeing what most people seldom glimpse, has maintained his passion for flying throughout his 17-year career. Brandi was introduced to helicopters at age 12, when New Mexico Game and Fish Department pilot Dick Brown rescued him from a perilous high-altitude hike. Brown later trained Brandi, who went on to conduct search-and-rescue missions himself.

Brandi has offered chartered tours like ours for five years now, and has enjoyed answering some unusual requests—such



**Top**—A helicopter ride over the City Different offers a new perspective on landmarks like La Fonda and the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi. **Above**—Pilot Joaquin Brandi

as fulfilling the last wish of a person dying of cancer. Thanks to New Mexico's robust film industry, Brandi has also lent his services to location scouts and camera crews for such productions as *El Camino Real*, a PBS documentary about the historic trading route from Mexico City to Santa Fe.

Brandi now pilots us west, to glide through Diablo Canyon's dramatic, paprika-colored cliffs. In the distance, golden light ripples across piñon-covered foothills, and as the sun sinks toward the horizon, the air is filled with anticipation of all that is yet to come.

**From \$150. (505) 670-0300, [www.gryphonhelicopter.com](http://www.gryphonhelicopter.com)**

—Ashley M. Biggers