

TAKE
MONDAY
OFF

SANTA FE AND TAOS

Cram seven days of gasp-worthy views, intimate art viewing and haute Southwestern chow into one long weekend



ABOVE IT ALL
Clockwise from top left:
Taos Pueblo village; The
Inn of the Five Graces;
Kit Carson House; a mussel
dish at La Boca in Santa Fe.

BY KATE BOLICK

IT USED TO BE that New Mexico was where you went to start from scratch. Willa Cather, D.H. Lawrence, Georgia O'Keeffe and Agnes Martin all found blank canvases, literal and figurative, in the Southwest's wide-open deserts and skies. Nearly a century on, the place's unavoidable art-ification—its artistic legacy having been capitalized on with far too many turquoise shops and high-end galleries—has diluted the promise of the primitive “blood consciousness” that Lawrence prized. But the area's many devotees (including art-world favorites Bruce Nauman and Susan Rothenberg) are onto something—the tremendous, arid countryside still imparts an unparalleled sense of renewal, and that old pioneering spirit lingers in local hangouts and expertly preserved little museums. The trick is knowing where to find it.

DAY ONE: FRIDAY

6 p.m. Arrive at Albuquerque International Airport (Santa Fe offers few commercial flights), pick up your rental car and make the very pleasant hour-long drive north on Interstate 25.

7 p.m. In a city loaded with boutique hotels it's difficult to stand out, but **The Inn of the Five Graces** (from \$425 per night, 150 E. DeVargas St., 505-992-0957) manages the feat. Each of the 24 adobe rooms and suites is bedecked in



layers of colorful Near Eastern textiles and artifacts, creating an Arabian Nights quality so sumptuous you'll wish you were traveling with a harem.

7:15 p.m. Santa Fe is a refreshingly walkable city with a slow, relaxed pace. Stroll across **Santa Fe Plaza**, a National Historic Landmark, and find an outdoor table at the nearby **Anasazi** hotel bar (113 Washington Ave., 505-988-3030). Bear in mind that you're 7,000 feet above sea level, so that one margarita will feel like two.

8 p.m. Amble over to nearby **La Boca** (72 W. Marcy St., 505-982-3433), a lively tapas spot run by local chef James Campbell Caruso. The small plates of green chiles blistered in olive oil, sea salt and garlic (a regional delicacy) are just the right mix of savory and kicky and light enough for your first day of travel.

DAY TWO: SATURDAY

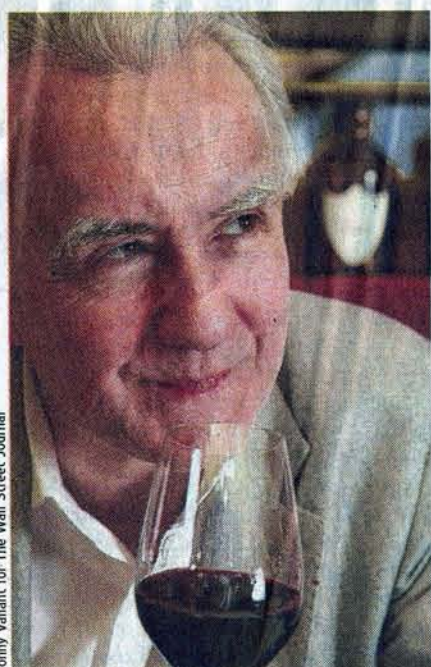
8:30 a.m. Have coffee and yogurt on the porch swing in one of the Inn's several courtyards, or drive 10 minutes past '50s motels and fast-food joints to the old-school, linoleum-floored **Pantry** (1820 Cerrillos Rd., Please turn to the next page



DRINKING WITH

ALAIN DUCASSE

The chef talks to **Lettie Teague** about travel, Champagne and the wine he's 'obsessed' with



"THERE ARE DAYS when I drink only water; those are the days that follow the nights when I've had too much wine," chef Alain Ducasse said to me soon after we met. What kind of night was last night, I wondered. I didn't have to wonder long. "Today is a Champagne day," he declared.

Chef Ducasse (no one calls him "Mister") and I met for lunch at Benoit, one of 22 Ducasse restaurants around the world and one of his two in New York. Benoit is the casual counterpart to his more formal Adour in the St. Regis Hotel, which, in turn, is nowhere near as fancy as his Michelin three-star restaurants in London, Paris and Monaco. (Although he was born in France, Chef Ducasse became a citizen of Monaco about three years ago.)



Chef Ducasse had been in New York for less than 24 hours by the time of our meeting and was slated to leave again very soon. When your empire is scattered all over the world, you can't stay in one place for very long. He estimated that he was in an airplane at least "once or twice a week" on trips to his various restaurants and hotels in London, Paris, Monaco and Las Vegas—not to mention Italy, Japan, China and the island of Mauritius off the southeast African coast.

Did he ever drink wine on airplanes? "It is the exception," Chef Ducasse said. (Sometimes he answered my questions in English and sometimes he spoke to his communications manager Sonia Toulouse, who translated his French.) Chef

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A NEW STYLE ICON

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Dan Neil reviews the Lamborghini Aventador
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ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

TAKE MONDAY OFF

SANTA FE AND TAOS

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505-986-0022) for reliably good New Mexican food. The sopaipillas—a puffy fried dough served with honey (another regional delicacy)—are served all day, and make a divine breakfast.

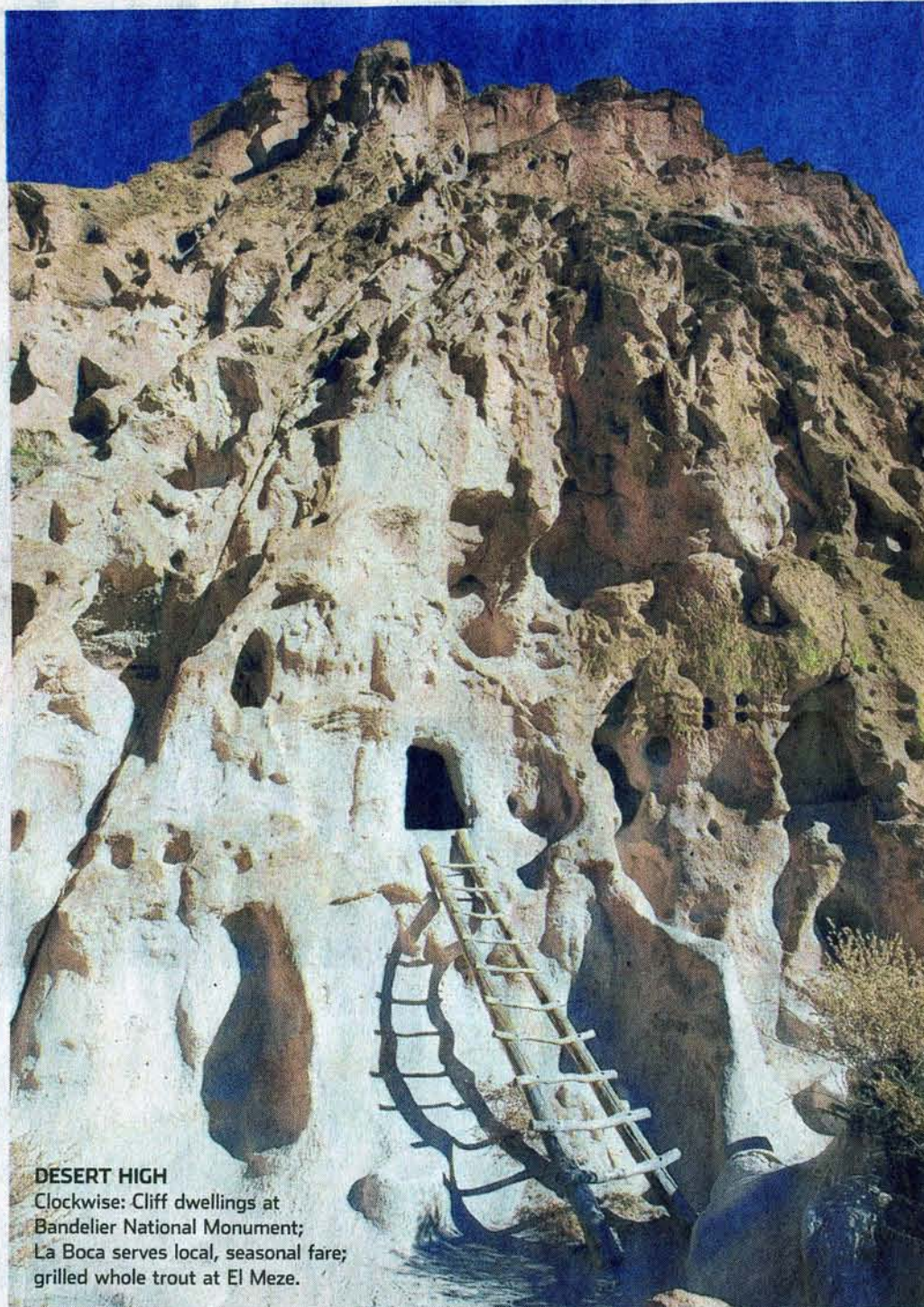
10 a.m. Drive an hour to the archeological sites at **Bandelier National Monument** (505-672-3861 ext. 517), so awe-inspiring that even non-outdoorsy types will enjoy getting acquainted with the region's original pioneers, the Ancestral Pueblo people. The 1.2-mile Main Loop Trail winds past and through remarkable cliff dwellings (an easy trek, though there are steep, stone staircases involved). Rarely does history feel so close at hand.

Or, stay in town and pay homage to the resident patron saint at the small but satisfying **Georgia O'Keeffe Museum** (217 Johnson St., 505-946-1000). Diehard fans of the artist might also consider the 50-mile trip to her home in Abiquiú.

Then wander through the bright and convivial **Santa Fe Farmers' Market** (1607 Paseo de Peralta, Saturdays and Tuesdays, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.). Just don't try to board a flight home carrying the chili raspberry jam; there are plenty of air-travel-friendly dried chili powders and teas to choose from. Then, bypass the tourist shops glutting the plaza and duck into **Spirit** (109 W. San Francisco St., 505-982-2677), a sophisticated women's clothing boutique, and a store at the old La Fonda Hotel, **Passemetrie** (115 Old Santa Fe Trail, 505-989-1262). The latter may qualify as a tourist shop, but the imported textiles are so gorgeous that it transcends categorization. Pueblo Indians peddle handmade jewelry on the sidewalk in front of the **Palace of the Governors** (105 W. Palace Ave.), and the retro-indie **Collected Works Bookstore & Coffeehouse** (202 Galisteo St., 505-988-4226) has big, cushy sofas you can disappear into with a book.

1:30 p.m. Time for lunch: The green chile stew, yet another local dish, at vivaciously decorated **The Shed** (113 & 1/2 E. Palace Ave., 505-982-9030).

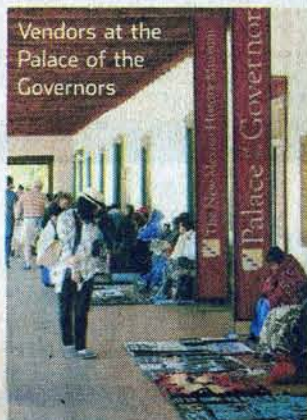
2:30 p.m. One of the best ways to get a feel for Santa Fe is to leave it—only then do you see it for the cultured bubble amidst endless flat desert that it is—and Taos, an hour and a half north, is just right for an overnight. If you have time, take the High Road (2.5 hours with no stops). You'll pass the **Pueblo of Tes-**



DESERT HIGH

Clockwise: Cliff dwellings at Bandelier National Monument; La Boca serves local, seasonal fare; grilled whole trout at El Meze.

uque Flea Market (10 minutes north of Santa Fe, directly off Highway 84/285 on Exit 171, 505-670-2599; open weekends, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.), full of intriguing antique rugs, blankets, furniture and jewelry, and wend through tiny dusty villages rich with hidden gems, such as the early 19th-century **El Santuario de Chimayo** (15 Santuario Dr., Chimayo, 505-351-9961), a small adobe church in which you can buy a little tin of "holy dirt."



Vendors at the Palace of the Governors

5:30 p.m. In the early 1920s, Manhattan salon hostess Mabel Dodge founded a literary colony in Taos (and married her fourth and last husband, Tony Luhan). It was thanks to her that D.H. Lawrence and other artsy 'utopia-seekers' flocked to the area. Now you can enjoy her hospitality as well: Her home is a handsome, comfortable inn, **The Mabel Dodge Luhan House** (from \$125 per night, 240 Morada Ln., 575-751-9686). The Solarium at the very top features four walls of bare windows revealing starry skies by night and a private sunrise by dawn. After checking in, relax with a mug of tea in the book-lined living room.

6:30 p.m. Drive a couple of minutes to **Doc Martin's**, at the Taos Inn (125 Paseo del Pueblo Norte, 575-758-2233), the definition of a local watering hole, featuring margaritas and live music every night. The most expensive offering on the menu, the \$19 Grand Reserve, is not too tart, not too sweet.

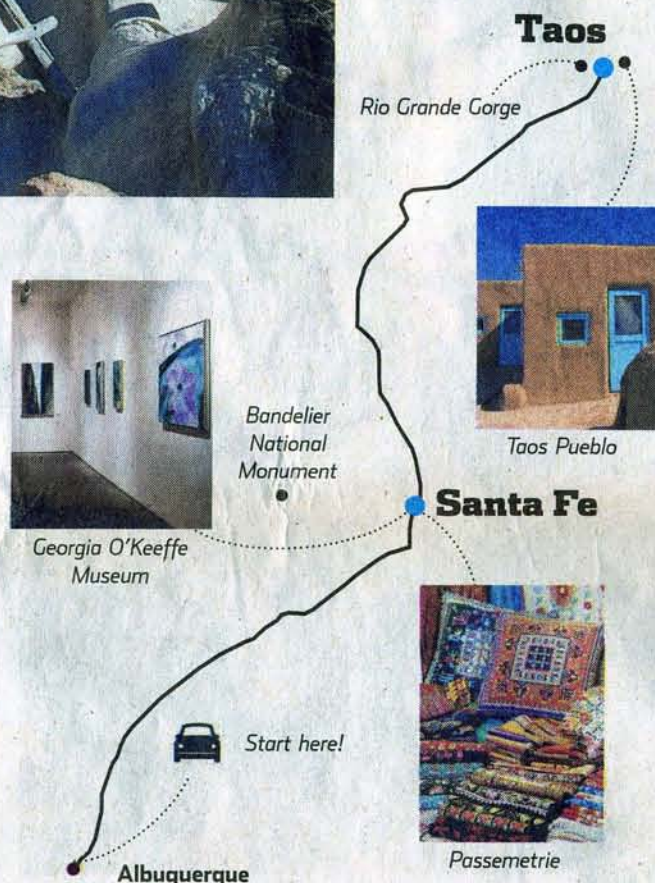


Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

7:30 p.m. Have dinner at **El Meze** (1017 Paseo del Pueblo Norte, 575-751-3337), literally a one-minute drive away, for upscale-rustic New Mexican and Spanish food in a homey 19th-century hacienda. The



Jesse Chehak for The Wall Street Journal (La Boca, El Meze, Passemetrie, Palo, Palace of the Governors); Alamy (Taos Pueblo); Georgia O'Keeffe Museum



Taos

Rio Grande Gorge



Taos Pueblo



Passemetrie

wines hail exclusively from Spain, Chile and Argentina, and a spacious patio offers an incredible view of the mountains. **The Love Apple** (803 Paseo del Pueblo Norte, 575-751-0050), in an 1800s chapel just down the road, offers up seasonal, local home cooking.

DAY THREE: SUNDAY

8:30 a.m. Solarium residents will be up with the sun. Fuel up for a busy day with the buffet breakfast of eggs, toast and fresh fruit served in the homey dining room. Check out.

10 a.m. Drive 10 minutes to the **Taos Pueblo** (575-758-1028), on the outskirts of town. It may seem like a tourist trap, but it's a fascinating complex of multi-story adobe buildings that people have been living in for 1,000 years (cue bad New York real estate joke). It's worth getting a guide, but if you can't find one (mine kept vanishing), you'll be fine with the informational pamphlet.

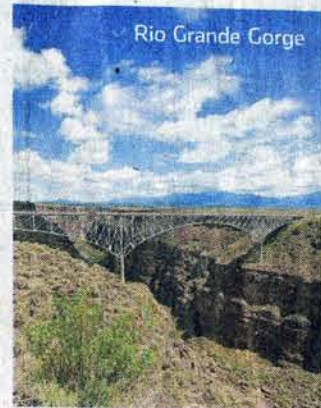
11:30 a.m. Drive back from the Pueblo, park near Taos Plaza, and set out on foot for an unpretentious arts-and-history tour. Start at **Hotel La Fonda de Taos** (108 South Plaza, 505-758-2211). D.H. Lawrence's rather awful "forbidden paintings" are kept behind a special curtain—not to be missed! Minimalist painter Agnes Martin, a more recent renegade (she died in 2004), has her own room at **The Harwood Museum of Art** (238 Ledoux St., 575-758-9826). The **Kit Carson House** (1/2 block east of Taos Plaza on Kit Carson Rd., 505-758-4741), the for-

mer home of the original pathfinder, features a rousing campy reenactment film that captures the frontier spirit and will make him a personal hero.

1 p.m. For lunch, walk over to the **John Dunn Shops** area and grab some fresh noodles from Marshall, the only guy with a food cart (open daily May through October, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.), and a lemonade slush at the counter window of **Coffee Cats** (124F Bent St., 575-758-0606). You can sit on a bench, then pop into the darling **Moby Dickens Bookshop** (124A Bent St., 575-758-3050) and **Monet's Kitchen** (124M Bent St., 575-758-8003), which has an ample collection of Le Creuset and Fiestaware.

2 p.m. Take a seven-mile detour north to the **Rio Grande Gorge**, park the car, walk over the bridge and marvel at the almost terrifying grandeur of that mighty waterway snaking through a gouge in the earth 565 feet below. Then head back to Santa Fe.

3:30 p.m. Upon arriving back in town, drive to **Ten Thousand Waves** (3451 Hyde Park Rd., 505-982-9304), the famed mountain spa, and spend the afternoon soaking and steaming. Book your massage appointment in advance, as they fill up quickly.



Rio Grande Gorge

8 p.m. Linger over a memorable haute American dinner at the out-of-the-way, one-room adobe **Aqua Santa** (451 W. Alameda St., 505-982-6297), presided over by the friendly chef-owner, Brian Knox. The menu is a blend of inventive and simple, and there's something transporting about an unhurried meal with friends out on the leafy patio.

DAY FOUR: MONDAY

10:30 a.m. After sleeping late, walk to the locally beloved **Tia Sophia's** (210 W. San Francisco St., 505-983-9880), which serves up hearty fare (note: they close at 2 p.m.). Catch up on the rest of your town wandering, then drive back to the airport.

► See more photos of the New Mexico trip at WSJ.com/Travel.

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