ditch once served as an antique shop where Mrs. Luhan sold part of her collection of Italian Renaissance furniture. Through heavy gates one approaches the main house across a flagged terrace studded with cottonwood trees and bounded by a meandering irrigation ditch. Since the terrace is above the line of irrigation, it is partially paved, but beyond the ditch the land falls off to a meadow so that the view from the terrace is impressive. The entrance is flanked by an intriguing cluster of pigeon houses on high posts.

Nucleus of the Dodge residence was an old farm house of five rooms aligned on axis in the usual Mexican fashion. North of this was added in 1920 the large living room block rising in tiers to the glassed mirador and beyond that the dining room and service wing. At the south end of the original block of rooms were added a log cabin (1918), garage, and an enclosed garden (1921). The “Rainbow Room” off the corner of the living room was the last unit constructed in 1924. The handsome portal came from an old house on the plaza of Ranchos de Taos.

The interior contains characteristic New Mexican features like corner fireplaces and latia ceilings. The Rainbow Room takes its name from the spectrum of dyed latias, a traditional form of decoration where colors were confined to black, white, and earth colors. Carved columns and doors were the work of a local carver, Manuel Reyna, “discovered” by Mrs. Luhan. The dining room fireplace with its eroded chimney breast was much admired and copied. Several old cupboards with spindle doors are set in interior walls while numerous doors and shutters from old houses were incorporated in the house and out-buildings. Unfortunately for historians, no record was kept of where these pieces originated. Indeed a number of old members were carted to the job by their owners when word got out in the community that Mrs. Luhan would pay good money for old “stuff.”

Though there is a beautiful lawn and many unexpected, picturesque features, the most interesting part of the Higgins house is the patio room surrounded entirely by inside portales and enclosed by regular walls. From the exterior this patio looks like a regular room with the usual windows, door, and chimney.

Return to Kit Carson Road. The plaza is back to the right. However, two miles further east on Kit Carson Road is the Leon Gaspar house—an extraordinary and unexpected pink, Moscovite house on the plains of Taos! It was built in the late 1920’s by the Russian artist who lived in Taos from 1918 to his death in 1967.

17. Taos County Court House. (Note: the drooping wires are temporary construction lines.)

Automobile Tour: Taos - 15.7 Miles

Taos plaza: Drive south on Highway 64.

0.6 Mile Left. Taos County Court House (1969, Architects Taos). An able design that evokes the scale and stepped silhouette of the most famous building in the area, Taos Pueblo, yet provides a contemporary, fireproof and functional building. A cluster of separate structures (court rooms, administrative offices, jail, public health, offices, etc.) set up reciprocal rhythms that animate the intervening space of the elevated courtyard. The main problem of the complex is its location away from the town plaza. This establishes a dangerous precedent of decentralization which could devitalize the plaza as well as seriously deface the Taos plain with ribbon commercial development.

2.9 Miles Right. Sagebrush Inn, built 1930. For almost two generations the most famous hostel in northern New Mexico. But its breath-taking view is being compromised by the ugly commercial sprawl along the highway.

3.8 Miles. Turn right on Highway 240. Though hard plastered and remodelled within the present generation, a fair number of houses along the ridge probably incorporate foundations and walls of late 18th century date. This is suggested by their stoutness and locations along the ridge to the north or the low bluff south of the road where they would have defensive advantage.

4.2 Miles Right. House with exterior murals. As recently as 1960 such landscape murals painted on houses and bars were fairly common in the villages of northern New Mexico. They were the work of an itinerant artist from southern Colorado named Alberto Lucero.
4.7 MILES. Hiram Long house (illustrated in Taos Adobes). Originally a placita type house built around an enclosed court, this structure has almost entirely melted away during 25 years of abandonment. This was the home of a Yankee settler who kept a tavern here and had a small whiskey still in the valley below. As Long lived in Taos between 1839 and 1861, the building may predate the Mexican War (1846-48) but documentation is lacking. The zaguan (covered entry approached through double gates) is the best remaining example in the state, and the sala had squared vigas and corbels, a feature reserved for apartments of unusual pretention. A unique feature was the adobe ramp leading to a smoke house on the roof.

6.1 MILES. Los Cordobas turnoff; settlement ¾ mile beyond. A cluster of houses still owned by members of the Cordoba and allied families. Individual houses have been remodelled but their grouping recalls earlier Indian dangers. Once the community possessed a large stone torreon, demolished in 1929. The barren setting recalls the treeless aspect of early New Mexico villages.

6.3 MILES. Cross Taos River. Left, a pleasant contemporary house on ledge above river, designed and built of rammed earth by artist owner, Robert Ray, 1955-62. Fronting road is a house built by Otto Picher from ruins of a burned grist mill; latest addition 1969.

Right, house of mill owner; built 1885, remodelled 1967.

6.5 MILES Right. Pedras Negras cemetery. The campo santo retains a few elaborately sawed crosses. The adobe structure near the road, a descanso constructed as a temporary shelter for the coffin, retains a quaint wooden facing with jigsawed design, built about 1865 by Leandro Martinez (restored 1960).

7.2 MILES. Millicent Rogers house is one of a series of fairly large ranch houses bordering Taos River. This place was enlarged in the 1930's and again in 1950 when Mrs. Rogers bought it.

7.8 MILES LEFT. The Juan Lucero house (c. 1780), another placita plan with zaguan. This structure was inhabited as recently as 1946.

8.0 MILES LEFT. Severino Martinez house is the best preserved placita house in the Taos area and one of the few whose history can be documented to some extent. The building site and a three-room house was purchased in 1824 by Don Severino, whose father, Antonio Martinez, had received a large land grant in 1788. Don Severino added to the original small house until rooms enclosed the 51x65 foot patio (in New Mexico called a placita). His will, dated June 8, 1827, divided the 12 room house between his wife and three sons.

Originally there were probably no windows on the exterior, only the gate, and a second walled corral was attached at the rear. The lower roof level of the earliest rooms (the front left corner) provided a platform with a high adobe parapet cut by loop holes from which the ranch could be defended in case of Indian attack. After that menace was quelled, windows were cut in outside walls.

Perhaps as late as the 1870's, wooden portales were added around the placita and across the facade. These remained until 1929 but while the house stood empty during World War II, treasure hunters all but wrecked it. A program of restoration was launched in 1966 and though not finished, the foundations and roofs were at least stabilized.

Pascual Martinez, son of Severino, was engaged after 1835 in the Chihuahua trade, and the big room with double doors between the placita and corral seems to have been where he stored his merchandise. He also operated a grist mill built in front of the house which was photographed in 1901. Pascual's son, Leandro Martinez, was born in 1843 and engaged in the St. Louis trade after 1862. He constructed his home next door on the north. Demolished for its interesting woodwork in 1963, the portal of this second Martinez house once had the date 1862 penciled in the ceiling. According to his son, Don Leandro was a skilled carpenter and built his own house.

Return to Ranchito Road and turn left. But at the 8.5 miles intersection where paved road turns right, the tour continues straight on a gravel road paralleling the river. On the left bank are decayed
ruins of several haciendas that were presumably comparable to the Martinez place.

10.5 MILES. Turn right on Questa Road (Highway 3). At this intersection on north side of road is the old Placitas oratory, a family chapel. The light scale of the belfry and entrance almost suggests Federal work. From a study of molding profiles, etc., it is clear that the carpenter who worked here also did the new entrance at Ranchos de Taos church. The building consists of two rooms; the smaller room on the left is too large for a sacristy and could possibly have been used as a Penitente morada.

10.9 MILES. Sharp left turn at Chevron station on road for Taos Pueblo. As soon as one enters Indian land the ugly commercialism that spoils the roadside ceases.

13 MILES. Taos Pueblo (No photographing without permit).

This is the only large, multi-storied pueblo remaining, though at the time of Coronado’s exploratory trip (1540), such were the rule. Although remodelling and additions continue to the present day, the core of the pueblo dates back to the early 1300’s. But ancestors of the present inhabitants were in the area in the middle 1200’s, as remains of earlier constructions not more than 1,000 yards from the present structures indicate.

A pueblo contains three basic elements: kiva, habitable rooms, and storage area. The kivas at Taos conform to tradition by being round and subterranean, and they vary considerably in size from small clan-size units to large community kivas. Whereas they usually tend to be in main courtyards, kivas here are located on the pueblo’s periphery, especially on the northeast side.

There are two “apartment blocks” or community houses. Although from the plaza they look like linear constructions, they actually pile up in somewhat pyramidal forms. The north (left) house is as much as eleven rooms wide and it climbs to five levels. Despite variations in floor level and building line, the structures maintain a harmony of scale and composition, a unity with infinite variation. There is a modular quality about the composition (determined by the convenient distance a log beam will span), and the resultant unity has infinite variation. The effect is not unlike Habitat, the apartment complex built for Expo ’67 in Montreal, Canada.

Originally there were no doors in the lower story. Access to ground level rooms was gained by climbing

20. Leandro Martinez house - a 1901 photograph.
a ladder to the roof top and then descending another ladder through a hole. But in the last 50 years, encouraged by the health department, windows and doors have been cut through walls. Although the rooms are larger here than at Puye, inhabitants of both pueblos spent much time out of doors and most household chores were performed on roof terraces or in the main plaza.

The Indian tradition of permitting the viga to project beyond the face of the wall was a practical matter. Limited to stone axes, hacking through a tree trunk was a big job so an extra long viga was simply allowed to jut beyond the wall. Such projections were useful for hanging chili and meat while drying, and aesthetically we admire the sharp cast shadows.

When nomadic Indian raids became severe in the 1760's, a defense wall was built around the pueblo. Where the walls stopped at the river bank, towers were erected. Air views still show parts of this wall. At the height of the incursions in 1770, the people of Taos permitted the Spanish to move inside the walls and build separate quarters of their own. To obtain building materials for this, the Spanish demolished their old walled “plaza.”

One other characteristic form of the pueblos is the outdoor adobe oven (horno). Although the Spanish introduced the beehive shaped oven to the new world, it is the Indians who continue to use it.

The church at the pueblo is not old (1847) as the older edifice from 1706 was destroyed in the uprising of 1846 when its thick adobe walls were pulverized by American cannon after the insurrectionists took shelter in the church. The destroyed building has weathered away most picturesquely and now serves as a campo santo. Return by the same road toward Taos plaza.

15.1 MILES LEFT. Leinsdorf house, with an intriguing park enclosed by a high wall.

15.5 MILES LEFT. Nicolai Fechin house (1927, designed by the artist). Almost invisible among the trees, the interior has a strong Russian flavor. It has numerous pieces of carved furniture and woodwork done by the artist who was a sculptor as well as a portraitist.

15.7 MILES. Taos Plaza.

Your driver awaits to begin the tour of the mountain villages.