

March 29, 2007

Our Georgia O'Keeffe Pilgrimage

We love Georgia O'Keeffe: her paintings of giant flowers, cow skulls, desert landscapes – her unique style. Since we were visiting her turf – Taos and Santa Fe, Northern New Mexico – we decided to find out more about her.

First, we visited the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe.

www.okeeffemuseum.org The tour starts off with a wonderful film about her life – her time in New York with Stieglitz, Lake George (“too green. Too many visitors”), Her first visits to New Mexico (“ I feel that I have finally found myself. I just can't stop painting!”), her permanent residence at Ghost Ranch, near Taos, in 1949; her death in 1986 at the age of 99. The pieces displayed in the museum were representative of her various styles, but none of her most familiar works are present.

Right after we left the museum we decided to visit the Ghost Ranch. The 1 ½ hour drive introduced us to the landscape that enthralled Georgia. We stopped to take pictures of a magnificent canyon wall incredibly striated with silver white, yellow ochre, raw sienna and vermilion. Further along we had to stop to click on huge pillars of red rock carved by nature in organic shapes, columns, roman and gothic arches.

When we arrived at Ghost Ranch we could understand why Georgia picked the place. The Ranch backs up to a towering canyon wall that contains all of the features described above. The opposite view is of the flat-topped Pedernal Mountain, a subject for many of her paintings. “ God told me that, if I painted it enough, he would give it to me.”

The ranch is currently a conference center owned and operated by the Presbyterians. Georgia lived there during the summer. She owned another house in nearby Abiquiu. The Abiquiu house is a rambling raw sienna adobe affair that just shouts O'Keeffe.

Anzie recalled that a friend had stayed at a monastery called Christ in the Desert, located somewhere nearby. We had a deuce of a time finding it. No wonder. It's off an unmarked, rut-filled dirt road 13 miles into the desert. It's a magical place, surrounded by multi-colored canyon walls on the bank of a river. The chapel has huge surrounding windows making the canyons and bright blue sky a part of the sanctuary.

We met Brother André, who gave us a short version of the monastery. It was founded in 1964 by Father Allred, who was commissioned by the mother church, Mount Saviour Monastery outside of Elmira, New York. – Chuck's hometown. Chuck remembers attending Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve there. Brother

Tim Kennedy once spent a month in residence. After getting the place started, Father Allred determined that it wasn't solitary enough! The silence of the place is deafening! So, he went to Mexico where he lived as a hermit until his death.

Fascinated with the place, we made reservations to stay for one night. And that's where we are now – cleansing our souls.

But, in between our first visit and our stay, we spent one night in Taos – at the Mabel Dodge House. Did you know that Anzie is Mable's great niece? Mabel married Anzie's great uncle, Edwin Dodge. Mable was a lover of John Reed (from the movie Reds), and after several other husbands, she moved to Taos. The staff and guests treated Anzie like visiting royalty. It's a fascinating house considering all the celebrated visitors that Mabel entertained there: Georgia, D.H. Lawrence, Ansel Adams, Robinson Jeffers (go google him).

Chuck had a great experience in Taos. He tracked down his college roommate and high school classmate, John Nichols, author of The Sterile Cuckoo, Milagro Beanfield War and 17 other books, plus screenplays and many essays. We ended up having dinner with him and visiting his house. More on this later.

Chuck & Anzie