

A NATIVE FEAST: SAVORY SAGE, CHILE, AND WILD GAME P. 53

New Mexico

MAGAZINE

Season's Delights

Exclusive
Cookie Recipes

**A Christmas
Different**
Celebrate in
Santa Fe

Plus:
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Festivities**
around our state

Bake our
Biscochito
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Restoring
400-year-old
**San Miguel
Mission**

**Jewish
Pioneers**
of the Old West

GIMME SHELTER: TAOS

Tree Time

CHRISTMAS IN TAOS is something Charles Dickens could not have imagined. The snow-covered mountains beckon skiers by day, and in the evening, buildings glow with *farolitos* and galleries throw fêtes, hoping to snag some holiday art sales. The sweet, pungent smoke of piñon fires wafts through the cold air.

In Taos, the first party of the season is a celebration of art and humor: **The Festival of Trees and Wreaths** kicks off a month of unusual New Mexico yuletide traditions. In the ballroom of the elegant, exotic **El Monte Sagrado Living Resort and Spa**, dozens of trees are decorated by local artists and businesses. One is a veritable art collection, its ornaments tiny paintings, sculptures, and other works crafted by members of the Taos Gallery Association. Another, the tree of Tony Whitecrow's Deerskin Art and Western Collectibles, might have leather garlands and ornaments of burned wood. One year, Francesca's Clothing Boutique festooned a tree with decked-out Barbie dolls.

Against the ballroom's mirrored walls, the dozens of trees become hundreds, and the room sparkles with multicolored lights. Local music institution The Jimmy

Stadler Band plays holiday tunes as servers circulate with sumptuous El Monte hors d'oeuvres.

El Monte Sagrado, which hosts the event, is a part New Mexico and part Epcot Center, with internationally themed rooms (such as the Moroccan Room) and a world-renowned spa with a saltwater pool and a graywater-fed indoor jungle. Special room rates are offered to festival participants.

Each tree at the festival has been purchased, decorated, and dedicated to benefit a specific nonprofit. On the night of the event (December 3), there is a silent auction; the money bid for a tree—usually between \$200 and \$1,500, depending on size and elaborateness of ornaments—goes to that tree's charity. Some people buy the trees to take home. Others donate them to needy local families.

\$20. El Monte Sagrado Living Resort and Spa, 317 Kit Carson Rd., (888) 213-4419, www.elmontesagrado.com. For info about Festival of Trees and Wreaths: Chris Baker at the *Taos News*, (575) 758-2241

O, Christmas Tree: Last year more than 70 opulent entries were on view at The Festival of Trees and Wreaths, held at the posh El Monte Sagrado resort. Trees are sold in a silent auction benefitting local charities.

