Georgia O’Keeffe’s ardent love affair with New Mexico lasted nearly 70 years. Over those decades she created some of the most memorable and iconic paintings of the last century, and became one of the Southwest’s most treasured visual storytellers. Her homes in Ghost Ranch and Abiquiú were as important to her work and her vision as the soaring buttes, windswept mesas, and the sun-bleached bones she collected.

But how did the houses come to play this role? What choices did the artist make in their construction? How did O’Keeffe live in these oases surrounded by the harsh and unforgiving country of the northern badlands?

Barbara Buhler Lynes, former curator of the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, and Agapita Judy Lopez, Director of Historic Properties at the Museum—offer something other than the expected academic response to these questions. Instead, they have corralled a remarkable grouping of letters, photographs, and paintings in order to immerse the reader in the artist’s daily life, and to explore the decisions she made about the character and fabric of each house. The result is an intoxicatingly intimate peek into a world previously unseen.

The book is divided into two sections, each focusing on one of the houses. In both cases, the argument is demonstrated beyond doubt that O’Keeffe created physical spaces that reflected an austere and formal modernist aesthetic. In both cases she took traditional Southwestern forms and changed them to meet her own requirements.

Although they have very different histories—among other things, Ghost Ranch was a relatively new house when O’Keeffe purchased it in 1940, and the Abiquiú house was a ruin in 1945—the buildings shared similar futures: open interior spaces, vast expanses of glass, and a relentless striving toward simplicity. Light and the permeable boundaries between inner and outer space quietly define everything.

Lynes and Lopez serve a rich feast for those hungry for walls, rooms, and outdoor spaces in various stages of construction. Piles of mud brick and before-and-after shots abound. But most satisfying and intriguing are the images of O’Keeffe living in these houses. These pictures tell the story of space and creation, of change and permanence.

Among many, a number stand out, but three examples will suffice. A picture by Tony Vaccaro at Abiquiú of O’Keeffe at breakfast is a stunning mélange of austerity and kitchen comfort. A truly wonderful photograph by John Loengard, taken in 1967, shows O’Keeffe bathed in the light of her kitchen window, every bit the artist at the heart of her home. Finally, the multi-picture study of the Abiquiú sitting room is masterly. Each of these photographs was taken in a world that O’Keeffe unequivocally created, nurtured, and continued to improve on until 1985. They also testify to the success of this book.

Peter BG Shoemaker is a New Mexico–based writer and recovering art addict.
Georgia O’Keeffe’s two houses in New Mexico—at Abiquiu and Ghost Ranch—are essential elements in her paintings, but their history has never before been detailed. Quoting liberally from the artist’s letters, Barbara Buhler Lynes and Agapita Judy Lopez create a vibrant picture of O’Keeffe (1887–1986) and her homes, which have long intrigued the public. An essay within Georgia O’Keeffe and Her Houses: Ghost Ranch and Abiquiu – Ghost Ranch by architect Beverly Spears describes the distinctive characteristics of adobe construction. The bountiful illustrations include photographs made especially for Georgia O’Keeffe’s two houses in New Mexico—at Abiquiu and Ghost Ranch—are essential elements in her paintings, but their history has never before been detailed. Quoting liberally from the artist’s letters, Barbara Buhler Lynes and Agapita Judy Lopez create a vibrant picture of O’Keeffe (1887–1986) and her homes, which have long intrigued the public. An essay by architect Georgia O’Keeffe’s two houses in New Mexico—at Abiquiu and Ghost Ranch—are essential elements in her paintings, but their history has never before been detailed. Quoting liberally from the artist’s letters, Barbara Buhler Lyn