





Combining WORK & PASSION

*Suzanne Allen-Guerra loves every
aspect of building houses*

BY JESSICA SMITH



*Suzanne Allen-Guerra,
left, and partner
Courtney Saldivar*

IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT SUZANNE ALLEN-GUERRA TOOK UP A CAREER IN CONSTRUCTION AND ARCHITECTURE — SHE'S BEEN AROUND IT HER WHOLE LIFE.

Allen-Guerra grew up in northern California, where her family owned a 5,000-acre cattle ranch. As a young man, her father transitioned from a ranching career to the construction business. He designed and built a wide variety of buildings across the rural areas of northern California and southern Oregon, from small commercial projects like tire stores to post offices, churches and residential homes.

"Basically, I grew up in construction," Allen-Guerra said. Even from an early age, she was involved with her father's work.

"I just remember sitting next to him," she recalled, "drawing my little houses while he'd be drawing up a new church or warehouse."



As a teenager, she spent her summers working for her father at various construction sites, doing anything from shoveling gravel to soldering copper plumbing joints.

Allen-Guerra's college education took her to Willamette University in Salem, Ore., for a degree in economics and then on to The American University in Cairo, Egypt, studying art, architecture and economics. She eventually relocated to the Centennial State, where she received her master's degree in architecture from the University of Colorado at Denver.

In 1993, she moved to Summit County, and not long after that, she started her own business — Allen-Guerra Architecture (then called Allen-Guerra Design-Build).

PASSION FOR THE JOB

The first thing one notices about Allen-Guerra is her energy. It practically radiates from her animated face, which is framed by dark, wild curls and seems to be perpetually smiling. Any topic related to building, architecture or design lights her up, drawing out detailed descriptions and thoughtful analysis that speak to her knowledge of the industry.

Glancing at any of the large photos of homes on her office walls, she can list off the site address and numerous details about the building, including its design style and whether or not it's a current trend.

Allen-Guerra Architecture works on high quality mountain homes



and mountain cabins as well as farms and ranches, which has become somewhat of a specialty.

“It’s sort of an à la carte menu when it comes to ranches,” Allen-Guerra said. “People will say, ‘We want a greenhouse,’ (or) ‘Can you add a road up there and put a gazebo up?’ So we’re constantly making modifications to the ranches that we’re working on.”

It took four years, for example, to complete work on a 1,500-acre ranch in New Mexico. The work included putting in major bridges and roads, as well as dealing with an unexpected archaeological find.

Allen-Guerra’s love for art and history come through when she shows excitement, rather than exasperation, over the discovery of various ancient tribal artifacts.

“It was really interesting,” she said.

In addition to homes around Summit County, Allen-Guerra Architecture has worked on projects nationally (including Texas, Hawaii, New Hampshire, Vermont, California and Wyoming) and internationally (Canada, New Zealand and Egypt, among others).

Fortunately, Allen-Guerra doesn’t have to do it all alone. She works closely with her partner, Courtney





ALLEN-GUERRA ARCHITECTURE HART RESIDENCE
GREAT ROOM INTERIOR RENDERING - FACING WEST
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"
DATE: 29 OCTOBER 2011

Saldivar, who joined in 2001. Saldivar also has a background in construction. Her family was involved in constructing many well-known buildings in Houston.

Saldivar and Allen-Guerra met in Summit County and within a year were in business together. Since then, Saldivar has moved back to Texas, opening the company's second office in Houston. The two also collaborate with a team of designers and architects, and work closely with various builders.

While she loves the artistic aspect of architecture and design, Allen-Guerra particularly enjoys watching the physical process of building.

"I like seeing the house coming together. I like helping solve the problems, because I don't think a house has ever been built that hasn't had one problem," she said with

a laugh. "It's a lot of fun working through all that. I love working with my builders that work with me, hand-in-hand."

SUPPORTING LOCAL COMMUNITY

While comfortable working on large houses and sprawling acreage, Allen-Guerra's crew doesn't relegate themselves to just the big projects. Recently, the company provided its services free of charge to help out a local Blue River family.

The couple was introduced to Allen-Guerra through a client. They had spent four years saving for, buying and improving a lot of land in Blue River, just south of Breckenridge. Although both hold steady jobs in the county, earning enough to build their own house was out of reach, financially.

Allen-Guerra was impressed with their story, the fact that they were working hard to pursue their dream, and decided to help out. She donated the company's services to help from the ground up, from architecture to engineering. The house is currently undergoing construction.

"I was really proud of them, that they had bought this lot, paid it off and wanted to build on it," she said.

Having lived in Summit County for more than two decades, Allen-Guerra is eager to support the local community in whatever way possible.

"It's one of the things we've done from the beginning of our business," she said, "is trying to help out locals who need a remodel or need a house and can't seem to get it any other way."





“
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— SUZANNE ALLEN-GUERRA

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