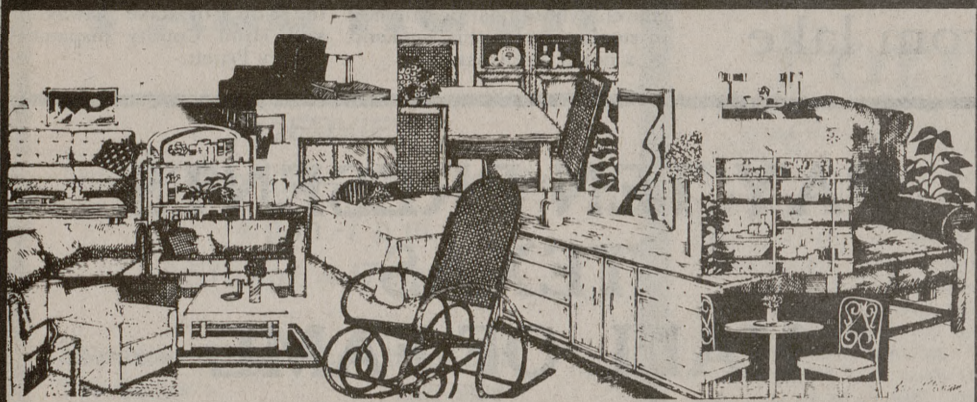


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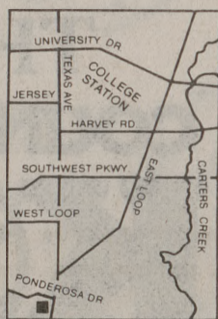
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## Builder keeps profits while cutting volume

United Press International  
ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Texas-born Rusty Rutledge has endured a withering home building slump by going against his upbringing. He is thinking small instead of big.

Friday, Rutledge celebrated 20 years of home building by kicking off the latest phase in what is a \$13 million housing development below the towering Sandia Mountains — a project unique in a city marked by the same building malaise that characterizes the industry nationally. It's been 10 years since the Weatherford native decided to reduce the number of houses he builds each year. Now, at 46, Rutledge can see the wisdom of cutting back from 300 to 25 houses a year.

"The big thing was the tremendous liability that it took to run a 300-house-a-year operation," he said. "You had to have 400 to 500 acres bought out ahead, and at least 600 lots under different stages of development to get them ready for the next year."

Today, he builds bigger

houses and pays more attention to detail. Those homes also cost more. His units command mountain and mesa views. They range from 2,400 square feet to 2,865 square feet and carry price tags ranging from \$134,500 to \$165,500.

Rutledge concedes his products are not for everyone, even if they are popular.

"Mercedes sales were up last year. That really sums it up," he said.

Two of his three sons are partners, his business flourishes and hunting trophies line the walls of his spacious, paneled office.

An impala taken during a Kenyan safari presides over the office. A regal peacock — its tail feathers fanned open — stands as a sentry in the corner. Behind a hand-carved desk sits the builder, a genial, robust man in a blue-checked shirt, blue jeans and boots.

"I guess my thinking really started changing in '68. We had a little mini-recession in '68 in the home building business," he recalls.

He said through his contacts with long-time builders, he began to see "people that were hell of a lot smarter than I was and good operators — what I caught in that trap."

"Just trying to get bigger and owing more money. A little slack off, and, goddam, they'd go under."

"We went from 300 houses a year to 25. We won't build more houses now, whether it be good times or bad times. Last year was the first time that proof of pudding really came out because we did 24 houses in '81. That was right on target," he said.

"What it sums up to is that overhead. We can make a profit on 25 houses a year — a small profit. You can't make the bucks like you can with 300 houses, but you can't go bankrupt either."

Rutledge also applied practical logic in designing his house. He readily admits "stealing" modifying successful floor plans he had seen in Oklahoma, Dallas, Houston, El Paso and Orange County, Calif.

About a decade ago, Rutledge noticed the success in Dallas "his and hers" bathroom separated by a Jacuzzi pool. Once Dallas buyers made it one of the city's most popular plans, Rutledge adopted it.

Now, along with a cedar roof, refrigerated cooling and other extras, it is his trademark.

Larry Carter, president of First National Bank in Albuquerque, has been Rutledge's banker for seven years. He effusively praises the son of a peripatetic Texas football coach.

"He's a business person who has worked hard and best with people, and that's why he's still building today," Carter said. "He's developed a reputation for building a quality house."

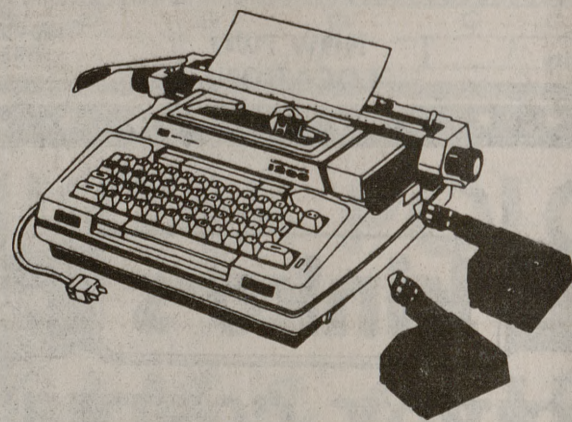
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