

Just About Anything...

TO DELIGHT THE CURIOUS READER

a blog by Mona McHaney

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The Only in America Tour—Part 6

The Sugar House: A Confection in Concrete

If your sweet tooth wasn't satisfied on Valentine's Day, allow me give you some more sugar.



In the shadow of a noisy freeway, the Sugar House gleams in an otherwise dilapidated neighborhood.



Owner Rufino Loya Rivas dedicated the Sugar House to his wife Celia and the city of El Paso. The couple left their handprints on one of the monuments.

Skirting the north edge of El Paso, Texas, my friend Thea and I discovered a unique treat tucked inside a modest working-class neighborhood, constructed half a century before Highway 54 burst its seams. As we wound past row after row of unremarkable tract homes, heat waves rose from the broken asphalt streets. Suddenly we turned a corner, and there it was—the Sugar House or La Casa de Azucar, as it is called in Spanish.



This highly-embellished gate (left) opens to a simply-constructed tract home (right).

Visitors gave the house its name, saying it looked like a wedding cake piled high with sugar frosting. The contrast between this fantastical creation and its drab surroundings is surreal. At first, I thought it was a mirage.

When Rufino Loya Rivas bought this house, it was all the Mexican immigrant and Levi Strauss Factory employee could afford. But Rufino promised his wife Celia that he would turn it into a beautiful home for her. He worked on it steadily from 1973 to 1998—nearly 25 years! And until his death in 2022, Rivas frequently welcomed passersby and gave them free tours of his home. Joy is not complete until it is shared.

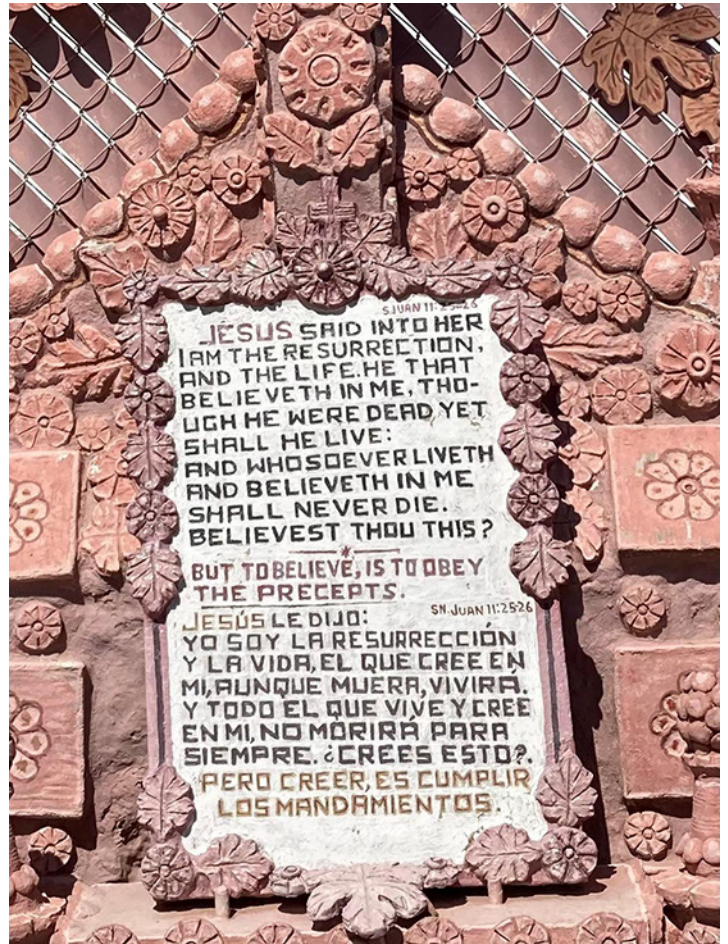
The Sugar House remains a private residence, and its future is uncertain. I can only hope that an admirer will arise to champion its preservation. America prides itself on being the land of opportunity. I applaud this story of an ordinary man who—by the power of love, through the joy of creation—transformed something mundane into something marvelous. The sweet became concrete.



The artist taught himself how to shape beautiful designs in concrete.



*Rivas memorialized the heroes and those who perished on September 11, 2001.
The flower buds (right) were fashioned from pop-bottle lids.*



*Rivas was inspired by the Baroque churches as well as the folk art of his native Mexico.
This tribute to Jesus took him 600 hours to create.*

Have a delightful day! 

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