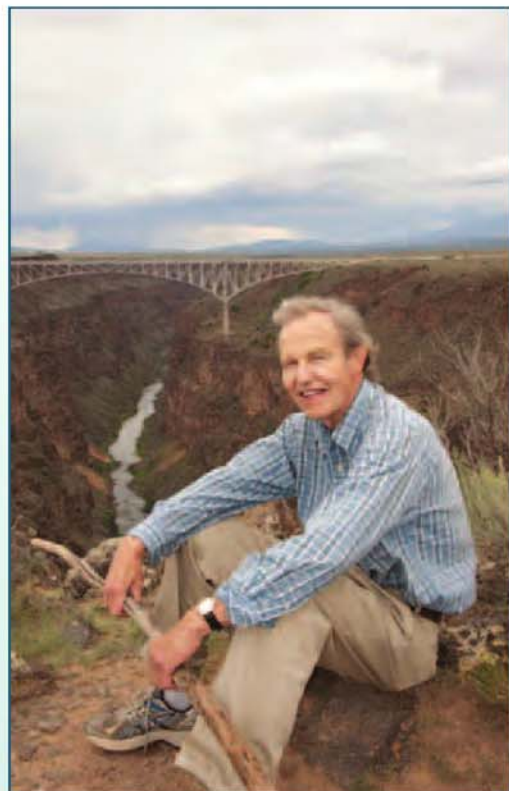


# The Taos Hum

story by TANIA CASSELLE  
photos by LENNY FOSTER

In this monthly column, writer Tania Casselle introduces us to the people who make Taos hum. Let's head to the mountains to meet two avid outdoorsmen who follow the call of the wild and the lure of the pen.



## John Nichols

Author John Nichols moved from New York City to Taos in 1969 and, as he puts it, “never looked back.” His debut novel, *The Sterile Cuckoo*, launched his writing career at age 24, and he’s never looked back from there either. Three of his 20 published books turned into movies, and he’s now the subject himself of a documentary, *The Milagro Man*, named for the most famous title in his New Mexico trilogy, *The Milagro Beanfield War*.

Nichols is in peak form with his latest novel, *On Top of Spoon Mountain*, a gutsy page turner packed with laugh-out-loud moments and smart one-liners. But the heart of the book is a tender story of a father’s love for his grown-up kids and the mountains—especially Spoon Mountain, which the out-of-shape, out-of-luck hero, Kepler, determines to climb again on his 65th birthday. Readers might interpret Kepler (novelist, Hollywood screenwriter, passionate about nature) as Nichols in disguise, but no, he’s a fictional character. “Most things that happen to him have never happened to me,” says Nichols. “On my 65th birthday I probably climbed a 13,000-foot mountain three times that week. I went wild climbing. I was never out of shape for 20 years.”

Raised in a tri-cultural family, Nichols was initially drawn to the multicultural community in Taos. “What kept me here was the land. I’ve hunted, I’ve fished, I’ve hiked everywhere within a 20 to 30 mile radius of my door. I’ve found infinity in a grain of sand here.”

Nichols writes daily. “I work all night pretty much until six or seven every morning.” He’s also busy archiving his documents and photographs for the UNM Center for Southwest Research. “Each year the archivists come up to Taos to take away another truckload, then we go and celebrate at the Trading Post: a bowl of spaghetti and a glass of wine.”

He describes himself as “becoming quite a hermit. Time is running out and I love working.” Aside from occasional after-hours guitar jamming sessions with friends at Brodsky Bookshop, “My biggest entertainment is putting on CDs of old blues players at 3 a.m. in my kitchen, and I play along with my guitar. That’s what I do for chills, thrills and excitement!”

More about the author and *On Top of Spoon Mountain* (UNM Press, August 2012) at [www.johnnicholsbooks.com](http://www.johnnicholsbooks.com).

John Nichols and Taylor Streit read from their new books at these book-signing events: *Tome on the Range*, Las Vegas, NM, on October 6, and *Collected Works* Bookstore, Santa Fe, on October 9. John Nichols also reads at Bookworks, Albuquerque, on October 28.

## Taylor Streit

On the day we talk, Taylor Streit informs me that he “slept out in the middle of nowhere last night, scouting for antelope and also scouting a secret stream. I can’t mention the name.” Secret streams are his livelihood. Lauded as a Legendary Guide in the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame, Streit opened Taos Fly Shop in 1980, which is now run by his son Nick, while Taylor operates the guide business that takes around a thousand people fishing each year. His three books include an updated 2012 edition of his classic *Instinctive Fly Fishing*. “I rewrote the whole thing. It’s got 20,000 new words,” says Streit, adding wryly, “It took me a year to rewrite it, and it took five years off my life.”

Streit moved to Taos from upstate New York in 1969 (the same year his fishing buddy John Nichols arrived), and he still loves New Mexico. “It’s the territory, the space, finding places I’ve never been before that other people don’t go to. And there are endless places to find.”

Even when this outdoors guy is trapped indoors, he seems happier with a rod in hand, judging by a recent book reading where he flicked a Fly-O practice rod around, demonstrating how to cast and—to the great amusement of the audience—how NOT to cast.

It’s a no-brainer to guess his favorite Taos place. “The Rio Grande, for sure. It’s still fabulous fishing, very remote. Thank God it’s in that big hole down there. Not many people are willing to go there.”

When not hunting or fishing the wilderness (“I’ll find one little drop of water and head there to know if there’s a fish in it”), Streit might dine in town, vouching for Orlando’s grilled shrimp and chile rellenos, and the shrimp tacos at Guadalajara Grill. (“I guess I eat a lot of shrimp.”) Aside from shrimp, he claims no secret vices. “I’ve worn ‘em all out,” he laughs. Streit’s recommendations for visitors to Taos? His thoughts flow straight back to water. “Rafting is a good one, and going to Williams Lake and some of the high places up by the ski valley. Just go fishing again!”

*Taos Fly Shop and Guide Service, 308-C Paseo del Pueblo Sur, Taos, (575) 751-1312, [www.taosflyshop.com](http://www.taosflyshop.com).*