

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

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The Mystery of the Casa de Bandini Roof.

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From paintings, photos, written documentation, and evidence found during the current restoration, we know the Casa de Bandini/Cosmopolitan Hotel has gone through a number of roofs. We can see from photographs that the original Seeley roof was replaced in 1930 by Cave Coutts Jr. From witness marks and measurements taken from those photos, the roofline matching the 1869 roof has recently been completed, and shingled. The mystery is trying to figure out the roof that is missing, the roof of the single story Casa de Bandini.

The first known image is an 1850 lithograph by C.G. Conns, depicting both the Estudillo roof, and the Bandini roof the same greenish grey, uniform with almost all the roofs depicted, even though the California Indians in the foreground have red in their clothing. But, the lithograph was made by Britton

and Rey of San Francisco, so the colours were not done on site. So, as a clue of the roofing material, it isn't much help

A painting by A. Sauerwein in 1858, several roofs in San Diego, the Casa de Estudillo for example, have red roofs, indicating tile. Interestingly, the roof on the Casa de Bandini is painted a light tan. This could have been done so the viewer could see the where one building stopped and another started, or perhaps the roof was thatch at the time. In both North American, and European thatching, reeds or straw are used. Reeds were easily available at the time in San Diego, and so were people who had the skills needed to build a thatch roof. Thatching is excellent insulation, in most cases better than fiberglass, and can last up to 70 years.

There are however, problems with this assumption. One conflict is a written account from 1858, wherein a storm blows tiles off Bandini's "main house." And in 1861, Under the direction of Ephraim Morse, a local merchant and family friend, the tile roof was re-patched (124 tiles), by Jesus Gonzales. The tiles cost three cents each, labor was \$45.

During the archaeological investigation of this restoration, many cobble foundations have been located, large amounts of removed plaster was revealed, and several boards that were reused in the Coutts Jr. remodel were discovered. Some of these boards helped in knowing the framing configuration of the porch roof in 1869. And a layer of broken roof tiles was found. It is well documented that an entire wing of the casa was destroyed in 1862, by a series of storms, a flood, and an earthquake, Nothing but the foundation remains. There are little to no records of the building between 1862, and 1869. We know that whatever was left of the Bandini roof would had to have been removed to add the second story. Had there been usable tiles, it is possible they were reused on another building or buildings, either during the time the building was vacant, or at the time of Seeley's construction. Like the Cosmo's bar, and Seeley's windmills, things that go missing are rarely recorded. Perhaps at some point in the future during research of another building, we will find a note that their roof tiles came from the Casa de Bandini.

