

# COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.  
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## Wearing Two Hats: Historic Preservation & Structural Integrity.

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In June 2009, student intern Chris Fuerstnau and I began work on repairing the adobe walls in a small room facing Calhoun Street. Our scope of work included removing chicken wire, cement stucco, and other non-historic material from the walls, re-blocking them with adobe brick, and then applying a scratch, brown, and finish coat of mud plaster to the walls.

This was a hands-on learning experience. We learned not only the fundamentals of scoring and laying adobe brick, tapering and leveling walls, and mixing and applying mud plaster, but also the challenges of when to remove or preserve in place historic fabric.

This presented a quandary. As preservationists, we wanted to leave the historic fabric intact to show the different layers of construction. But as masons, we were equally concerned about structural integrity, efficient use of time, and future maintenance-related issues.

After removing the cement stucco, we discovered four-to-six courses of brick at the base of the cross and end walls. They were

part of an historic stairway that was constructed in 1872-1874, and once led to the second-story annex. The stairway appeared on the 1937 Historic American Building Survey (HABS) drawings, but was probably removed in 1947-1950, when the building was remodeled by Frank Cardwell.

The framing in the ceiling, which was constructed for the stairway opening to the second floor, has iron cut square-head nails in the toeholds. The lime plaster contains horsehairs, suggesting that it dates to when the Cosmopolitan Hotel operated in the building (1869-1888).

Chris and I were able to preserve the wood framing in the ceiling and the lime plaster remnants, but the bricks, except in a few cases, were removed. First, they bulged so far out as to prevent plumb bob measurements along the wall base.

Second, the lime plaster mortar was dust. It lacked any residual strength. The bricks were held in place behind plywood attached to the cement stucco with chicken wire.

Third, the adobe in many sections behind the brick had melted or broken off. To re-block this area with adobe bricks required removing nearly all of the bricks,

Fourth, their structural and

historic integrity had been compromised and altered over time. Many of the bricks were not only broken, but they had been put in piecemeal without any consistent pattern (i.e., header-stretcher). In addition, the lime plaster was not evenly applied in the joints, but simply plastered over much of the brick surface, suggesting this was done later, perhaps as part of the 1930 rehabilitation undertaken by Cave Couts, Jr. when he covered the walls with cement stucco. Removing the bricks, even though they were photo-documented by Nini Minovi, raised another question about how best to interpret the missing stairway visually. Fortunately, the witness marks of the stairway platform left an imprint in the adobe cross wall. Chris and I re-plastered the indentation to enhance its visibility. It should be obvious to future visitors that a stairway or something similar once abutted the adobe walls.

