

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

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The Cosmopolitan Hotel Team

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As the days, weeks and months go by at the Cosmopolitan Hotel project, I am amazed by the number of people from varying backgrounds that are coming together. You see it on a KPBS television program such as Nova when a group of scientists walk the Gobi Desert looking for fossils: one is a palaeontologist who specializes in vertebrates, another knows invertebrates, one is a GIS-mapper, one is a potassium-argon dating specialist, one is a cook, and one is a spy...How romantic! The Gobi Desert!

But here in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park a team of multi-disciplinary scientists, archaeologists, historians, historic architects, historic interior decorators, global positioning experts, historic demolition experts, finish carpenters, electricians, accountants, interpreters, and even SDG&E and AT&T representatives are doing something similar. The shared goal is to provide our visitors an experience from the past: the restored, earthquake-retrofit Cosmopolitan Hotel, as it looked from 1869 to 1872.

A couple of years ago, historians

began piecing together what was known (or knowable) about the 1827 Bandini downstairs and the 1869 Seeley upstairs. Using maps and disenos (Mexican Era boundary "designs" or maps), Bandini letters and other records, San Diego Coast District Historian Victor Walsh, local historian Ellen Sweet and translator Cynthia Hernandez drafted an historic overview of the building's history and occupants. Taking up the historic baton, local architects at IS Architecture and Heritage Architecture moved in to identify and save as many original pieces of wood, sections of adobe, and historic windows and doors as possible. Historic interior specialist Bruce Coons of Save Our Heritage Organization was also a consultant for room configurations, staircase configurations, window and door openings, and roof and chimney lines. The team shared his personal collection of historic photos of the building through time.

District archaeologists Niloufar (Nini) Minovi and Nicole Turner have been there every day, working closely with archaeological contractor Scott Wolf of ASM Affiliates. Nicole and Scott have been doing global positioning system and other forms of mapping. They consult with teams of Soltek Pacific demolition workers, carpenters and plumbing sub-contractors who are under the capable direction of Patrick English. Patrick in turn really

enjoys working with custom finish carpenters, door and window restoration specialists, and historic chimney masons in recreating the feel of an historic building. Robert Robinson, District Civil Engineer ably does all permits, inspections, and some necessary redesign.

Each new detail is interesting as we assemble to consider new finds and their implications for the modern plans. For example, a spur foundation off the main adobe toward Seeley Stables makes the adobe look even larger than the current building, requiring concrete sub-contractors to work with the archaeologists in spanning the space, and coloring the concrete span to disguise it against the dirt-colored adobe wall. Interpreter Eric Minella of Old Town Family Hospitality contributes to the debates as to which interesting historic detail should be interpreted for the general public, as the construction goes on.

The Old Town San Diego Cosmopolitan Hotel project has been better than working in the Gobi Desert (the 'Nova' program mentioned above) as we listen to each colleague's opinions, keep in mind multiple working ideas on treatments, and move forward to the grand opening. All we need now is a dinosaur...I would be very surprised, but anything is possible...

