

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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Casa de Bandini, The Movie. Part I I

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As the director of an historic movie about the village of San Diego in 1828, you are trying to fill in gaps in the script; the building of both Casa de Bandini, and Casa de Estudillo, probably the largest construction project in Southern California at the time.

The script-writers rough draft of Scene I presented more questions than answers. You decided to send the staff to a small town in Baja California to research adobe-making and construction, which is still done there by traditional means. The writers come back with drafts for the next four scenes.

Scene II: Making lime for whitewash.

Setting: A short bluff overlooking a beach.

Scene: Large piles of discarded sea shells are being thrown into the top portion of a tall stone kiln. Driftwood is shoved into

the bottom compartment, and a worker is pumping a large bellows to create heat over 750 degrees. There are several barrels nearby to transport the newly-made lime by mule and *carreta* to the construction site in on the plaza.

Scene III: Cutting trees to make roof beams and lintels.

Setting: The woods.

Scene: Two men are chopping down pine trees with broad axes. There is a pit saw set up where we can see the top man sawing a felled tree into squared lumber. In the background, a pair of horses pulls a cart loaded with timbers.

Scene IV: Tanning leather for cutting straps.

Setting: Tanning shed.

Scene: Groups of Indian men and singing sailors from the Sandwich Islands are soaking cowhides in vats of brine, staking the cured hides on the ground to dry, and cleaning and scraping the hides. In the background hides are drying. Two women are cutting hides into straps.

Scene V: The ships

Setting: La Playa (The Beach)

Scene: Small boats shuttling back and forth from shore to a large foreign ship loaded with goods for trade. *Mayordomos* (foreman) and their workers are busy counting and inspecting the quality of the hides and tallow supplied by Bandini and Estudillo to pay for the trade goods they ordered. Don Juan Bandini's carpenters have selected carpentry tools, iron stock for forging nails, tool blades and hardware, some New England hardware such as door knobs, and a New England wooden door as the finishing touch for the Don's new home. His daughters and their Estudillo cousins are being rowed back to shore, talking excitedly about the silks, jewelry, and new the coffee and chocolate set they have requested, aware that their wishes depend on the value of the hides and tallow.

As the historians said, no one really knows exactly how the Casa de Bandini was built. Until a time machine is invented, we are relying on archaeologists, historians, and other professionals for information about the methods, materials, and tools used to construct these two magnificent buildings.

