

# 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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## A Cameo Appearance

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Archaeologists from ASM Affiliates just found a cameo at the Cosmopolitan Hotel. Do you, or anybody in your family, have a cameo? Is it a family heirloom? Do you have an old photo of your mother, or grandmother, wearing it?

A cameo is a portrait or scene carved in relief with a contrasting colored background (the opposite is called *intaglio*, a piece carved below the surface). Cameos were carved in shell, agate, onyx, and lava. Most often, they depicted women's heads. Cameo design in the 18th and 19th centuries turned to a renewed interest in ancient Greek and Roman styles, so cameos often show mythological scenes also. Cameos were popular pieces of jewelry from the Victorian Era (1837-1901) through the early 1950s. Cameos made out of shell were less "formal" and appropriate to be

worn during the day.

Physical traits can help to date a cameo. The long Roman nose may denote an early piece (before 1850), while a nose slightly upturned can be dated as a 19th century piece. The more simple "classical" woman's head and the ones with men's heads are generally early. After being carved, more recent cameos were usually placed in a setting made of gold; older cameos were usually set in brass or silver. They could be made into brooches, earrings, rings or pendants.

The cameo found at the Casa de Bandini/Cosmopolitan Hotel site is made out of shell, oval in shape and depicts the profile of a bearded man with short, curly hair and a straight nose. He is wearing something like a robe, or a very loose garment, which is only visible around his neck. The man's face looks classical Greek or Roman. It's very hard to know if it was a jewelry piece because the setting is missing. But the most amazing element of this cameo is its size, this wonderful piece is 0.4" long and 0.2" wide! The size of a pine nut!

The carving detail is so exquisite that one can only be amazed by the dexterity of the artist who made it. This piece could have been a tiepin due to its small size, but the analysis is just beginning on this item.

The expression "a cameo appearance" refers to a small role performed by a well-known actor, making reference to the small faces that cameos have. We don't know if this cameo belonged to the Bandinis, or how it was lost and buried in the ground. But what we can imagine is that this beautiful piece was once a prized object and made the wearer very happy and proud. Once displayed, it will continue its mission of delighting people, but now as an invaluable piece of history.

