

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

VOL. II. No. 26

SAN DIEGO, ALTA CALIFORNIA, MARCH 6, 2009

PRICE: FREE

Signatures

William F. Mennell
District Services Manager
San Diego Coast District

With the exceptions of the roof, porch retaining walls, and first floor stucco, the removal of non-historic fabric portion of the project at the Cosmopolitan project is nearing a close. The underground archaeology is also close to completion in the larger sense.

What has happened thus far: a very skilled team of dedicated archaeologists from ASM and State Parks, supported by an architect from IS Architecture, has been very carefully excavating and completely documenting everything. The construction crew from Soltek Pacific, used to doing demolition, has transformed into a team of removal, not destruction, with craftsman-like precision.

The overcoats of labors of the 1930s, 1950s and 1970s are not being ignored. The 1930s threaded brass and steel pipes, the 1950s doors and ironwork, the festive paint of the 1970s all tell part of the story of the survival of this magnificent building. Examples

of each have been archived, and recorded.

What has been exposed underneath is a priceless collection of "signatures".

The names and life stories of an overwhelming majority of the generations of craftsmen, labors, women, and children involved with the construction of the Casa de Bandini, and later the Cosmopolitan Hotel are lost to history. But their work, their signatures remain.

Here is a cobblestone foundation, here lime plaster--the lime made in a kiln, not purchased in a bag. Above a door opening a lintel cut with a pit saw, here adobe blocks hand-turned and dried in the sun.

Here are "square" nails driven with a hammer that may have been passed down for 2 generations or more. There are floor joists cut in a steam powered mill. Paint here from 1869.

Exposed for only this short time, like internal organs during an operation, these deceptively simple components are perhaps our only insight to the labor and lives of the people that made them. This patient, lovingly called The Cosmo, has been undergoing an operation that has taken hundreds

of hours; and the lab work, analysis curation, and recordation will require hundreds more.

The skills the teams are using today have been developed in large part to understand those that were once used traditionally, but now are so transformed they have become unfamiliar.

Every part of this building was made by someone or a team of people, and took hundreds if not thousands of hours of their lives. In their time, and "all people live in modern times", these were the products of their life that day. Written in sweat, pride, fire, and thought, the components of the Cosmo are all witness to those lost names, and their stories.

And perhaps challenges. Hand plane a piece of trim. Write a materials order with a quill and ink. Get steam to power a saw. Navigate a sailing ship. Pump a forge bellows. Feed over 100 workman everyday from an horno. Turn 50,000 adobe bricks. Find, cut and deliver logs to San Diego. Do it all without electricity, or internal combustion engines. These challenges and more they met, like it was just another day.

