

# 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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## A Landmark Saved: Couts Restoration, 1930-1945 Part 1

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On July 21, 1928, Bandini's grandson, Cave J. Coutts, Jr., bought the property from Marion and Vernetta Newman of San Mateo County for \$10 in gold coin—a striking indication of just how far the old house and premises had deteriorated. Two years later, Coutts, Jr. remodeled the building, which he leased to various individuals for use as a hotel and restaurant called the Miramar Hotel.

Coutts took considerable liberties, remodeling the historic building in the Steamboat Revival architectural style then popular in the South. The entire building was stuccoed. The redesigned roof no longer had the wide, horizontally extended overhang that graced the Cosmopolitan Hotel. The wooden shingles of the old hotel were replaced with asphalt shingles. The first-floor porch was plastered and lined with

a balustrade railing of “cast stone” (concrete). Decorative white lath curved screens embellished the tops of the porch and balcony on all sides. The stucco walls were painted yellow; the window sashes white, and the porch trim green and brown. Junipers, century plants, and other shrubs lined the beds along Mason and Calhoun Streets. For the first time, the building was equipped with plumbing and gas lines; the latter to accommodate the installation of modern kitchen appliances, such as a three-burner gas plate range.

Coutts' promotion of the building focused on his Hispanic heritage. The grandson of Juan Bandini, he restored the home as a memorial to his mother, Ysidora Bandini de Coutts. The development of the auto-tourist industry and the public's captivation with the state's Spanish origins convinced him to market the “Casa de Bandini” as an upscale tourist destination that celebrated a Spanish heritage rich in pageantry and refinement as exemplified by his grandfather. John D. Spreckels, the sugar baron, had restored the Casa de Estudillo adobe

across the street in 1910 and converted it into a successful tourist attraction as “Ramona's Marriage Place” because of its association with Helen Hunt Jackson's popular 1884 novel *Ramona*.

The auto-tourist industry suffered though, with the onset of the Great Depression and later World War II. Coutts' operation never prospered during these years. Few tourists visited his hotel. Rent money often went directly back into maintenance. Rooms were sometimes crowded with local transients, and finding responsible or reliable lessees was an ongoing problem. Mrs. J. W. Fisher, who managed the leasing contracts and took a personal interest in the building, complained in one of her letters to Coutts that “...poor old men from the county (are) sleeping two, three & four in a room, two in the cantina between the dining room & scullery and all the other rooms similarly filled. Of course that makes it (‘the *casa*’) not an apartment house, club or rooming house or hotel. It is just a rest home.”

