Juan Bandini's adobe was the scene of many early California intrigues, from opposition to Mexican-era governors to supporting U.S. troops at the Battle of San Pasqual. Built from 1827 to 1829, the house was purchased and refurbished starting in 1869 as the Cosmopolitan Hotel by Albert Seeley. Based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, California State Parks staff spent 10 years on the building’s rehabilitation as an historic hotel. Historic background is given to set the stage for the archaeological and architectural papers in the SCA 2012 symposium “San Diego’s Cosmopolitan Hotel: Archaeologists and Architects Look at Nineteenth Century San Diego.”

As early as 2003, California State Parks (CSP) had begun converting the commercial restaurant known as La Casa de Bandini (Figure 1), a popular San Diego dining spot whose lease had come due, into a more accurately rendered historic site known as the Cosmopolitan Hotel, seen here as it appeared in 1872 (Figure 2). Since part of the mission of a State Historic Park is to take care of legacy buildings, CSP staff began to turn time back to an interpretive period of significance, that is, between 1821 (the end of the Mexican War of Independence) and 1872 (the year a fire gutted the community). Perceiving the building to be a premier example of a Mexican-era adobe (CA-SDI-17,862), CSP staff worked with a number of specialists to find out the building’s construction history, what (if any) historic fabric was left, and how to rehabilitate the building into a hotel and restaurant for use by the park’s 7 million visitors per year.

Funding from concessionaire Delaware North Parks and Resorts, the California Cultural and Historical Endowment, and CSP deferred maintenance programs allowed the following contracted partners to be selected: archaeologists ASM Affiliates, Inc. and Walter Enterprises; historic architects IS Architecture and Heritage Architecture; the Zooarchaeology Lab of the San Diego Natural History Museum; historic structural engineer Fred Webster; historic paint analyst Susan Buck; and general contractor Soltek Pacific. The following paper was an introductory presentation for 10 papers gathered into a symposium entitled San Diego’s Cosmopolitan Hotel: Archaeologists and Architects Look at Nineteenth Century San Diego. This historic overview was based on the work of CSP Historian II Victor Walsh, private San Diego historian Ellen Sweet, and historic Spanish documents translator Cynthia Hernandez.

OLD TOWN SAN DIEGO’S HISTORY

The historic town of San Diego was a well-regarded Pacific Rim harbor, home solely to the Kumeyaay/Tipai/Diegueño peoples until the arrival of Europeans in 1542. The native people had a village named Kasaa’ay (in English Cosoy) at the mouth of the San Diego River, shown here near Old Town in the Bancroft Library’s 1874 Vischer image (Figure 3). This obviously geographically important site was selected by the Spanish officials in 1769 as their mission outpost, and a presidio stronghold was built. Only after news of the Mexican War of Independence reached the outpost did the soldiers, now Mexican citizens, establish permanent residences on the nearby “Old Town” flatlands, surviving by ranching and selling cattle hides in the U.S. East Coast’s hide and tallow trade.

These San Diego Presidio descendents were of Spanish, Portuguese, Caribbean and Mexican Indian, African, Jewish, and other ethnicities, and were called Los Californios. Representative of this Californio community, and of interest here as the first “architect” of this building, was Juan Bandini, shown here (Figure 4) with his daughter Margarita. Bandini, of Italian and Spanish background from
Peru, had been educated in Europe and settled in San Diego in 1822 with his sea-captain father. Five years later, he began building an adobe “town house” on the southeast corner of the placita. Perhaps Bandini was misunderstood when described in 1836 by Massachusetts-born visitor Richard Henry Dana in *Two Years before the Mast*:

> Wednesday, January 6th, 1836: Set Sail from Monterey, with a number of Mexicans as passengers…. Among our passengers was a young man who was a good representative of a decayed gentleman…. He was of the aristocracy of the country, his family being of pure Spanish blood, and once of considerable importance in Mexico … accomplished, poor and proud and without any office or occupation, [he leads] the life of most young men of better families, – dissipated and extravagant when the means are at hand … keeping up an appearance of style … [but] standing in dread of every small trader and shopkeeper in the place. He had a slight and elegant figure, moved gracefully, danced and waltzed beautifully, spoke good Castilian ... and had, throughout, the bearing of a man of birth and figure. Yet here he was, with his [ship’s] passage given him … for he had not the means of paying for it … [he] gave four reals – I dare say the last he had in his pocket – to the steward, who waited upon him. I could not but feel pity…[Dana 1911:296-297].

The Bandini home, depicted in the 1867 Henfield photo (Figure 5), was the scene of his family life through the death of his first wife, his years newly married to his second wife, and numerous political intrigues so characteristic of Alta California politics. It was also the scene of a Christmas 1838 raid by...
Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado to arrest Bandini for sedition, and the December 1846 arrival of a beaten U.S. Army scout, famously named Kit Carson, announcing that the U.S. had lost the Battle of San Pasqual. (It should be noted that Bandini had supported the U.S. military, thinking that they would map and protect his land and holdings far better than a distant Mexican government.) By 1851, however, Bandini was broke, owing $12,822.90 to the French gambler Adolfo Savin.

Just after the 1867 Henfield photo was taken, the house was sold to Albert and Emily Seeley (Figure 6) as a stage stop and hotel. At that time, the Seeleys began the construction of a wooden second story onto the adobe first floor, renaming the building the “Cosmopolitan Hotel.” As newspaper advertisements of the time noted, it was the stage station between San Diego and Los Angeles, the stage leaving the hotel daily at 6 a.m. and arriving at San Juan Capistrano at 7 p.m. Period newspaper ads take notice of those most important of things for a frontier town, a well-stocked bar with lots of cigars. A tired Cosmopolitan Hotel, no longer a stage stop and located in an increasingly abandoned part of the now-bustling city of San Diego, was finally sold by Seeley for $15,000 in 1888.

Operated in its next life as a rooming house, and later as an olive packing plant, there are several good memoirs by children whose lives seemed intertwined with the house during these phases, children whose marbles and toys were found by archaeologists during this project. Figure 7 shows the structure on the Old Town Plaza in the 1920s.

Since no pre-Mexican-era occupations of this parcel were found, the following occupations of the parcel are summarized in the phases below:
• Early Bandini era (Mexican 1827-1846)
• Late Bandini era (U.S. 1846-1869)
• Early Seeley era (1869-1874)
• Late Seeley era (1874-1888)
• Akerman and Tuffley (et al.) era (1888-1928)
• Cave Couts, Jr. era (1928-1945)
• Frank and Nora Cardwell era (1945-1968)
• California State Parks Ownership (1968-present)
• Diane Powers era (1978-2005)

California Indian presence throughout these phases of the building’s occupation is well known, up to modern California Indian businesses in Old Town today, and is the subject of one of the symposium’s focused papers.

RESTORATION/REHABILITATION

Based on CSP plans as early as 2003 to rehabilitate/restore the building as a restaurant and boutique hotel, new concessionaire Delaware North Parks and Resorts took occupancy as of June 2005. Operating the business for just a short time, CSP staff and contractors wrote historic and archaeological treatment plans, made a tentative list of necessary cultural resource inspections, began historical background research at locations including Bancroft and Huntington libraries, started exploratory treatments and test excavations, and designed a monitoring program.
Figure 4. Juan Bandini and daughter Margarita (Courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library).
In the early phases, this multidisciplinary staff had a sharp learning curve to figure out the house’s resources; the proposed rehabilitation plans; the organizational chart for the general contractor and the eight sub-contractors; the relationship of landowner and CSP’s oversight staff; seismic, fire marshal and Cal/OSHA regulations; hazmat rules; etc. Initially, we did not understand each other, needing to learn who spoke what dialects – general contractor, structural engineer, historic-sites archaeologists and architects, adobe conservators, historic adobe restoration specialists, historic paint analysts, historic interiors specialists – but then we began to understand. We learned immediately that the traditional territoriality, of the archaeologist vs. the architect especially, would not work, as we were up against others whose expertise was not necessarily the identification and conservation of historic fabric. We had to work as a unit. We began mandatory Wednesday meetings such as the one shown in Room 104 in Figure 8, depicting (clockwise, from top left) restoration specialist Bruce Coons; CSP archaeologists Therese Muranaka and Nini Minovi; CSP project manager/grant writer Bill Mennell; CSP civil engineer/inspector Robert Robinson; CSP Archaeology, History and Museums Division historic archaeologist Larry Felton; and ASM Affiliates Field Director Scott Wolf.

We set about learning who each of us was and how to blend vocabularies, styles of recording, and the tricks of each trade: protocols for magnetic north, true north, and project north; working in engineer’s scale (tenths of feet) to aid the general contractor; and how to blend AutoCAD vs. hand-done drawings. Each of us memorized every single pipeline, electric line, roof height, and bar placement, and negotiated the saving of historic fabric mano-a-mano, as we say in archaeology. The historic architects learned...
Figure 6. Albert and Emily Seeley (Courtesy of California State Parks).
features and components; the archaeologists learned joists, seismic retrofit, and bond beams. And so the work started.

As seen in Figure 9, we could not use the traditional approach in which architects and archaeologists divide their line of involvement in an historic building at the ground surface. We needed to blend our focus to include both tasks. We all needed to share the road to make certain that this most beautiful of buildings was properly recorded for posterity. All of us joined together in our respect for the quality workmanship, which was primarily Indian labor on the first floor and itinerant laborers on the second. We needed a name for our approach, using at first Larry Felton’s casually coined “Vertical Archaeology.” Historic architect Ione Stiegler of IS Architecture took this concept over next, weighing in with the phrases “Building Archaeology” and “Architectural Archaeology” as the project evolved.

CONCLUSION

Even in a long and varied archaeological career, projects like this do not come along often. An 1820s adobe with almost 80 percent of its original fabric, topped by an 1860s hotel with almost 50 percent of its historic material (70 percent if one allows for recycling) is almost unheard-of. It was a privilege and an honor to look over the construction details left by those original planners and workers, to uncover the remnants of their lives and the lives of its many residents (no matter what social class they represented). It is now covered up again (Figure 10), hidden for another 100 or more years. The 10 papers given in this symposium were presented to show showcase what was discovered.
Figure 8. Cosmopolitan Hotel Project, Room 104 staff meeting.

REFERENCE CITED

Dana, Richard Henry, Jr.
1911  *Two Years before the Mast: A Personal Narrative*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston. [Originally published in 1840.]
Figure 9. Cosmopolitan Hotel Project, Mason Street wing, architectural and archaeological investigations.
Figure 10. Cosmopolitan Hotel Project, final finishes.