

# 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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## The Casa and the Don

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By the 1840s, Juan Bandini's casa grande (large house) on the plaza had emerged as the hub of San Diego's social and political life. The home had between 12 and 14 rooms, a curved clay tile roof, and a large sala or front parlor room, where Bandini held lavish parties and political meetings. It measured 33 feet (Mason Street) by 16 feet (Calhoun Street).

"Señor Bandini's adobe is the finest house in town. The parlor is a fine, large room with a white pine floor, so worn from dancing that the knots project. On the walls are several fox hunting scenes and a picture of Washington. On the clock case—a Yankee clock—is the American flag," wrote Major S. P. Heintzelman of the U.S. Army on May 16, 1849.

Exactly where Bandini acquired the knotted pine and other materials that graced his home is uncertain. It could have come by ship from San Francisco, from the forest of Cuyamaca, or perhaps Bandini's rancho in Riverside, where he harvested

timber, including pine.

The floors in the other rooms were either compact earth or clay tile. In her memoir, Arcadia Bandini Brennan, a great grand niece of Juan Bandini, noted an interesting household practice that she had heard from her grandaunt Tia. "She told me that...the floors were fixed by having the ground in each room well swept, then wet down by buckets of water. When dry, green grasses or soft leafy branches were put all over, evenly laid and the beautiful rugs were rolled out."

The sala was special to the Don. It was the first room to be blessed in 1829 by a Catholic padre. It was where Bandini entertained, gathered with friends, and plotted Alta California's political destiny.

The New England shipping agent Alfred Robinson left an evocative account of a fiesta that he witnessed at Bandini's home in 1833. In the brightly-lit sala, thronged with people, Robinson saw a graceful couple perform Mexico's national dance, el jarabe.

The female dancer...cast her eyes to the floor, whilst her hands gracefully held the skirts of her dress, suspending it above

the ankle...Her partner,...rattled away with his feet with wonderful dexterity. His arms were thrown carelessly behind his back, and secured, as they crossed, the points of his serape,...

In this same room, Don Bandini laid plans in 1831 to successfully overthrow Governor Manuel Victoria, met representatives from the Padres-Hijar expedition in 1834, and plotted against Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado in 1836-1837. In 1846, he greeted Commodore Robert F. Stockton in his sala, offering his house as Stockton's military headquarters.

Recently, State Park's on-site inspection team uncovered the tongue and groove Douglas fir flooring (albeit in a very deteriorated condition) that Albert Seeley put down in the sala in 1869. There's no evidence of the original pine floor, but "it's possible we could find remnants of it," says historical consultant Bruce Coons. "We are not finished, and we are learning something new every day about this remarkable building."

