THE REUSE OF CONSTRUCTION MATERIAL AT THE COSMOPOLITAN HOTEL: A CASE STUDY IN BUILDING ARCHAEOLOGY

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Without a paper trail of blueprints, the complex construction history of the Cosmopolitan Hotel had to be recreated based on direct observation and investigation of the building itself, supplemented by limited historic photographs of the building. Added to, subtracted from, and remodeled several times since the 1820s, a common element of the building’s construction was the need to reuse construction material, an issue for archaeological interpretation of historic buildings. A matter of economics and availability, there has been a “green” trend throughout the history of the Casa de Bandini/Cosmopolitan Hotel. This history of reuse has contributed greatly to the preservation of historic fabric and the analysis of the building itself.

California Department of Parks and Recreation has spent nearly a decade on the rehabilitation of the historic Casa de Bandini/Cosmopolitan Hotel in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park. The intent was to strip away the highly inaccurate, romantic, Spanish Colonial interpretation of the building, and restore it as the Cosmopolitan Hotel of ca. 1872. This placed the building within Old Town San Diego State Historic Park’s established period of interpretation mandated in the Old Town San Diego State Historic Park General Development Plan (Sturgeon et al. 1977). Historic architects and archaeologists worked together to investigate the building stratigraphically to understand the construction sequences and document in detail all phases of construction.

The Cosmopolitan Hotel (CA-SDI-17,862) is located at its original site at the southeast corner of the plaza in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park. The building, originally Casa de Bandini, was constructed in 1827-1829 as a single-story adobe residence for Juan Bandini and his family. In 1869, Albert Seeley, a stagecoach operator, purchased the building and added a wood-framed second floor to the first-floor adobe. The Case de Bandini then became the Cosmopolitan Hotel. Used as a stage station until 1887, and an olive factory from 1900 to 1919, the same building underwent "Steamboat Revival" and "Spanish Colonial Revival" remodels in 1928 and 1945, respectively.

The structure has been added to, subtracted from, and remodeled over time, and each construction phase added to its unique and complex history. A common element of the building’s construction history is the reuse of construction material. During preliminary investigations and throughout the rehabilitation itself, several instances of construction material reused from one construction phase to the next were discovered. Although not necessarily a deliberate feature, but rather a matter of economics and availability, there has been a “green” trend throughout the history of the Cosmopolitan Hotel. Observed reused material has not only supported this trend, it has contributed to the understanding of building material and techniques and a more accurate interpretation of the historic Cosmopolitan Hotel.

CONSTRUCTION ERAS

Similar to methods used in excavating archaeological sites, in building archaeology layers of the building are peeled away in order to uncover the evolution of the building. Certain construction characteristics help define reused material from specific construction eras. These are sometimes evidenced by paint layers on building materials, differences in the type of lumber used (e.g., mill-sawn versus hewn), and the use of cut nails versus wire nails. During the rehabilitation of the Cosmopolitan Hotel, the different construction eras were defined primarily by periods of ownership and occupation. The focus of this analysis is on the history of reused, or rather recycled, material from the following four construction eras defined below: Bandini, Seeley, Couts, and Cardwell eras.
Figure 1. Cosmopolitan Hotel, southwest corner cobble foundation.

**Bandini Era (1827-1869)**

The original building was constructed in 1827-1829 as the residence of Don Juan Bandini and his family. The Bandini Family was prosperous, and socially and politically influential throughout the 1830s and 1840s. Don Juan Bandini raised cattle, invested in lumber and mining operations, and also held various government-appointed posts. However, as the price of cattle declined, the California Gold Rush boom died in San Diego, and a few bad investments became evident, Juan Bandini was forced to transfer title to all of his property in 1859 to son-in-law Abel Stearns (Stiegler et al. 2004; Walsh 2011a). Although the Bandinis’ ownership of the building had ceased, little happened to the building from 1859 to 1869, and therefore this period has remained within the defined Bandini era.

The building itself was a typical Mexican-period, single-story adobe structure. Characterized by thick adobe block walls, deep-set windows, and whitewash finishes, it sat prominently at the corner of the plaza, some 4 ft. above street level; this is represented by the grand southwest corner cobble foundation shown in Figure 1. The building originally had a wood-thatched roof that gave way to clay roof tiles, and it had a central courtyard.

**Seeley Era (1869-1888)**

On April 28, 1869, stage line proprietor Alfred Seeley purchased the Casa de Bandini from Abel Stearns for $4,500 (Brandes 1974). The building changed dramatically under the ownership of Albert
Seeley. This dramatic change is best represented by the addition of a wood-framed second story to the original single-story adobe, blending nineteenth-century Mexican adobe and American wood-framing construction techniques (Figure 2). Also characteristic of this era are broad verandas, formed by a wraparound front porch and balcony covered with a wide, overhanging, shingled roof; turned wooden columns supported the balcony, which was enclosed with turned baluster railings. Another significant difference under the ownership of Albert Seeley is that the building was no longer a U-shaped structure. The majority of the northern wing of the adobe had collapsed as a result of earthquake damage in 1862 (Walsh 2011b:30). Under the ownership of Albert Seeley, the building was L-shaped.

Couts Era (1928-1945)

In July 1928, Cave Couts, Jr., son of Ysidora Bandini and Cave Johnson Couts and grandson of Don Juan Bandini, purchased the Casa de Bandini. In 1930, Couts remodeled the building into a hotel and restaurant (Walsh 2011b:36). The establishment was called the Miramar Hotel (Sweet 2009). A kitchen and dining room were installed on the ground floor, and the upstairs rooms were refurbished. Electricity and indoor plumbing were installed in the building.

As a result of the renovation, the Casa de Bandini took on a look similar to the Steamboat Revival style of architecture popular in Louisiana (Figure 3). The entire building was covered with peach-colored Portland cement stucco. This preserved the Seeley-era redwood clapboard exterior siding on the second floor, and it provided an excellent relative dating tool to better determine the construction sequence of the
building. The downstairs porch along the west and south sides was plastered and trimmed with a balustered railing of concrete. The most distinguishing characteristic of this phase was the vertical lath screens that were installed along the top of the porch and balcony on all sides of the building.

Cardwell Era (1945-1968)

After the death of Cave Couts, Jr., his estate sold the building to James and Nora Cardwell in 1945. From 1955 through 1965, the building was listed as “Casa de Bandini Hotel.” The Cardwell remodel was styled as a “romantic” interpretation of the Casa de Bandini during the Spanish Colonial period. The building was stripped of its Steamboat Gothic trim. The porch railing was enclosed with a solid perimeter wall. Large, rectangular, stuccoed columns replaced wooden posts supporting the balcony. Railings and rustic wooden posts, with an undulating chamfer, replaced the more elegant chamfered Couts-era posts. Decorative tile and ornate wrought-iron trim, railings, and light fixtures were used around the house.

MATERIAL REUSED DURING THE BANDINI ERA

The reuse of material probably started at the time of its original construction in the recycling of local material from nearby buildings. Materials such as clay tiles, wood beams, and lintels were likely salvaged from the hilltop San Diego Presidio, already in a state of deterioration at this time (Walsh 2011a:28). This possibility is also supported by the scarcity of wood during this time. Unfortunately, the lack of physical evidence on the building itself, along with a lack of comparative architectural data from the Presidio, prohibits archaeologists from making such claims with certainty.
MATERIAL REUSED DURING THE SEELEY ERA

The first-floor adobe was predominantly kept in place, with the exception of the deteriorated north wing. When the second floor was constructed, it involved removal of the Bandini-era clay tile roof. During the rehabilitation project, the Couts-era 1930s stucco was removed, exposing the adobe walls. Heavy reuse of roof tile, probably clay roof tiles from the Bandini era, as repair chinking was noted in the mud plaster on the exterior of the building, as well as Seeley-era repairs prior to the installation of the Seeley-era lime plaster.

During the Seeley era, new doors were installed on the first-floor front facade, and two of the Bandini-era doorways were raised approximately 2 ft. higher. At Door 104B, located on the first floor facing Calhoun Street, there is a hand-hewn lintel used in the construction of a higher doorway during the Seeley era (Figure 4). Several Bandini-era lintels were hand-hewn, regardless of the availability of milled lumber. The first documented saw mill in Alta California appeared in 1823-1825 at Mission San Gabriel (Clar 1959:18), and by the mid-late nineteenth century, there were several lumber mills throughout California (Felton 1985). Although this is not an absolute dating tool, it is likely that the later periods of construction used milled lumber as it became more readily available. The exception, as in the case of Door 104B, was the reuse of existing materials.

Similar hand-hewn Bandini-era lintel stubs flank the doorway on the face of the building 2 ft. below the existing Seeley-era lintels (Figure 5). The lintel was cut out during the Seeley era, and the lintel

Figure 4. Door 104B, first-floor entrance from Calhoun Street.
stubs were left in the adobe. The first-floor openings typically have three to four lintels overhead to span the width of the thick adobe walls. The lintel stubs represent one such lintel. Behind the lintel stubs, evidence suggests that the remaining lintels were completely removed. The hand-hewn lintel used in the higher doorway is probably one of these lintels from the original lower doorway.

**MATERIAL REUSED DURING THE COUTS ERA**

The Couts era is the most representative historic era for reused material. The abundant reuse of material from this era perhaps resulted from the “hard times” of the Great Depression (Walsh 2011b:41), represented by a tradition of frugality common in many building trades back then, the difficulty of obtaining readily available materials from local outlets, or simply convenience. Whatever the reason, there was a concerted effort to reuse existing material, which has preserved entire sections of on-site historic fabric and architectural features. Understanding this reuse, a concept common in the archaeological record the world over, advances our understanding of nineteenth- and twentieth-century construction methods and sequences in Old Town San Diego.

One example is the reuse of Seeley-era plaster as fill to build up an exterior porch facing Calhoun and Mason streets. In the 1930s, the Seeley-era lime plaster was removed from the face of the building, and the entire building was covered in peach-colored Portland cement stucco. Figure 1 shows the original Bandini-era cobble foundation, located at the southwest corner of the building. Also visible in this photograph is the use of the Seeley-era lime plaster as fill during the Couts era to construct a porch with a
retaining wall. The heavy reuse of Seeley lime plaster as fill was also noted when the Cardwell-era pony wall was removed during the recent rehabilitation. Plaster fragments included scored finishes with a pale pink color. The scored “pink” plaster fragments recovered during the subsurface excavation allowed historic paint analyst Susan Buck to determine Seeley’s exterior lime plaster finished color (Buck 2009:31). Her cross-section revealed an unpigmented limewash finish and a pale pink finish that was applied several years later, both dating to the era. This is an excellent example of Couts’ reuse contributing to our overall analysis of the building.

During the Couts remodel, a new roof was constructed, including a balcony roof. Figure 6 shows a witness mark for a joist and beam from the Seeley-era 1870s balcony roof. The witness mark is shown by the lack of paint on the exterior of the building where the joist and beam were located. Pieces of the Seeley balcony roof were reused at several locations throughout the building. These included beaded Douglas-fir joists (purlins), mortised redwood beams, and multiple tongue-and-groove redwood boards. The in situ witness mark and reused material, along with historic photographs, contributed to an accurate reconstruction of the Seeley-era balcony.

Examples of reused material from the Seeley balcony include a mortised redwood beam to reduce the reveal of a doorway leading from the first floor to the courtyard. Mortised beams were also reused as blocking in the second-floor annex addition, located at the east end of the building, to lower the ceiling at this location approximately 2 ft. The Couts era roof, still in place during the recent rehabilitation of the Cosmopolitan Hotel, was built with reused tongue-and-groove redwood boards from the Seeley balcony.
Figure 7. Cosmopolitan Hotel, roof, 2009.

roof (Figure 7). These painted boards had unpainted witness marks that show where the joists (purlins) intersected the boards.

Prior to the application of the 1930s stucco, Couts’ workers also boarded up abandoned Seeley-era second-story doorways, windows, and other open spaces, using balcony roof decking from the veranda of the Cosmopolitan Hotel (Figure 8). Joist witness marks, shown by the lack of paint, provide evidence that these boards were reused from the Seeley-era balcony. These sections stand out from the redwood clapboard siding, providing a perfect blueprint of the locations and dimensions of the doors and windows of the Cosmopolitan Hotel. Due to the lack of photographic evidence, this was particularly important to the interpretation of the building from the courtyard side. In addition, Seeley balcony beaded joists (purlins) were scattered and reused in Couts’ construction. Reused joists were found throughout the second-floor framing. Recycled Seeley-era redwood boards were also used as stucco stops for the 1930s balcony roof and to infill gaps in the Seeley redwood clapboard siding.

Another interesting example of reuse is that during the Couts era, several Seeley-era studs were recycled following the demolition and relocation of Seeley-era walls, particularly during the remodel of the second-floor rooms facing the courtyard. Walls were shifted to allow for the addition of several hotel guest bathrooms. Seeley-era wood members were used to construct walls and frame doorways. The use of wire nails aided architects and archaeologists in dating the construction of these walls as being post-Seeley-era, regardless of the obvious use of Seeley-era lumber. According to William Adams (2002), structures built in the United States prior to 1883 were almost entirely constructed with cut nails or earlier types that predate the wire nail. Buildings constructed after ca. 1897 were typically built using wire nails (Adams 2002:70). According to historic consultant Bruce Coons, prior to 1888 wire nails were not used in building frame construction in San Diego (Coons, personal communication 2011).
MATERIAL REUSED DURING THE CARDWELL ERA

During the Cardwell era, several abandoned Seeley and Couts doorways were filled in with reused Couts-era lath nailers. These nailers were originally used to attach vertical lath screens along the top of the porch and balcony on all sides of the building. The 1930s balustrade was left in place, providing structural support for a Cardwell-era retaining wall, both visible in Figure 3. Figure 9 is of an original Seeley-era doorway filled in during the Cardwell ownership. Lath nailers, shown by the alternating pattern of painted and unpainted squares, were used during the Cardwell era to infill abandoned Seeley- and Couts-era doorways on the second floor. Part of a cardboard sign, probably from a nearby restaurant, was used for the fill-in in this doorway. The 1930s balustrade was encased in the Cardwell retaining wall. In addition to the balustrade being reused as a substructure for the new retaining wall, large food cans were used to fill in the gaps between balusters (Figure 10). Other examples of reused consumer items were Kentucky Bourbon bottles found in a Cardwell-era brick retaining wall in the courtyard, used as fillers. However, it is possible that these bottles were deposited here by construction workers for nonfunctional reasons.
Figure 9. Cosmopolitan Hotel, Mason Street wing, breezeway.
REUSE DURING THE REHABILITATION

During the rehabilitation of the Cosmopolitan Hotel, several items were reused in keeping with the history of the building. Material was reused and recycled throughout the project whenever possible. A good example of modern reuse was the relocation of a Seeley-era wall to accommodate an ADA-compliant restroom. In the second-floor annex, located at the east end of the building, two walls were relocated, in which the framing was more than reused; it was picked up and moved from the top plate to the floor plate. This continued history of reuse has preserved historic fabric and has also kept with the “green” trend of the building. In addition to the reuse of material at the building, several items removed were saved for future reuse. The 1950s Cardwell-era second-floor balcony posts, beams, and railings were removed from the Cosmopolitan Hotel when the Seeley-era balcony was reconstructed. Samples were collected for an architectural collection, and the remaining members were reused during the construction of a sustainable-living, straw-bale, art studio in east San Diego: El Estudio at Casa Colibrí (Figure 11). Elements were used for the balcony posts, loft beams, and interior stairway railing.

CONCLUSION

Similar to an archaeological site, construction layers were stratigraphically peeled away to reveal the evolution of the Cosmopolitan Hotel. Historic architects and historic archaeologists worked together
Figure 11. El Estudio at Casa Colibrí, 2010. Courtesy of Robert Deason (owner).
to understand each other’s techniques in documenting the past. Several examples of material reused during the different construction phases have been discussed, along with what this concept can tell us about the building. As with archaeologists everywhere, the concept of recycling and reuse of objects in human daily lives remains a challenge to the interpretation of the archaeological record at both prehistoric and historic archaeological sites. Artifact assemblages can offer clues to periods of occupation, sometimes in the form of maker’s marks and date stamps, but archaeologists know that the life cycle of an artifact can continue for several years after its creation date. This same concept applies to buildings. The cut nail used as a dating tool for nineteenth century construction becomes problematic when we assume that the decline in popularity of the cut nail and the mainstream use of the wire nail can be used to date an architectural feature with certainty. Overall, the diligent documentation and analysis of the building, regardless of this margin of error, has contributed greatly to an accurate interpretation of the historic Cosmopolitan Hotel (Figure 12).

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