

Building the Olivas Adobe

Construction began as early as 1841 for the smaller adobe buildings on the site and in 1847 for the first floor of this larger two-story Monterey style adobe home, with the second floor added and completed between 1850 and 1852. Chumash Native American workers, skilled in adobe making, did much of the construction work. The Olivas family lived here until 1899, raising 21 children – eight girls and 13 boys.



The Olivas Adobe, circa 1890.

*Balcony: Doña Teodora Olivas with her daughter Francesca Olivas Suytar;
ground floor: son Raimundo Olivas Jr., daughter Rebecca Olivas De La Riva holding child, and pet deer.*

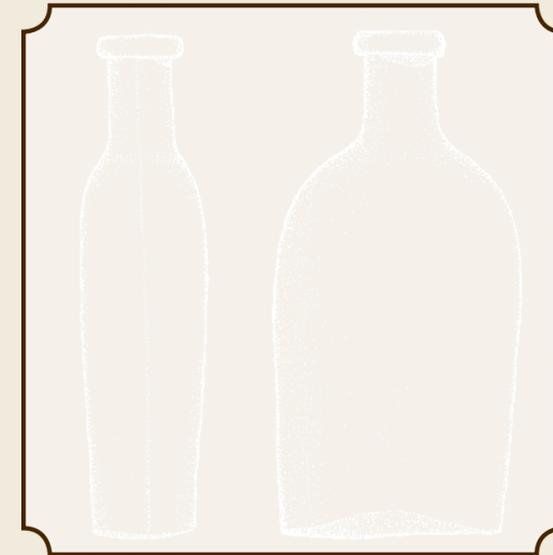


*Wedding portrait of Manuela "Nellie" Olivas
(grandaughter of Don Raymundo and Doña Teodora
Olivas) and Ramon Ayala, circa 1892.*



Small Adobe, circa early 1920s.

The Small Adobe

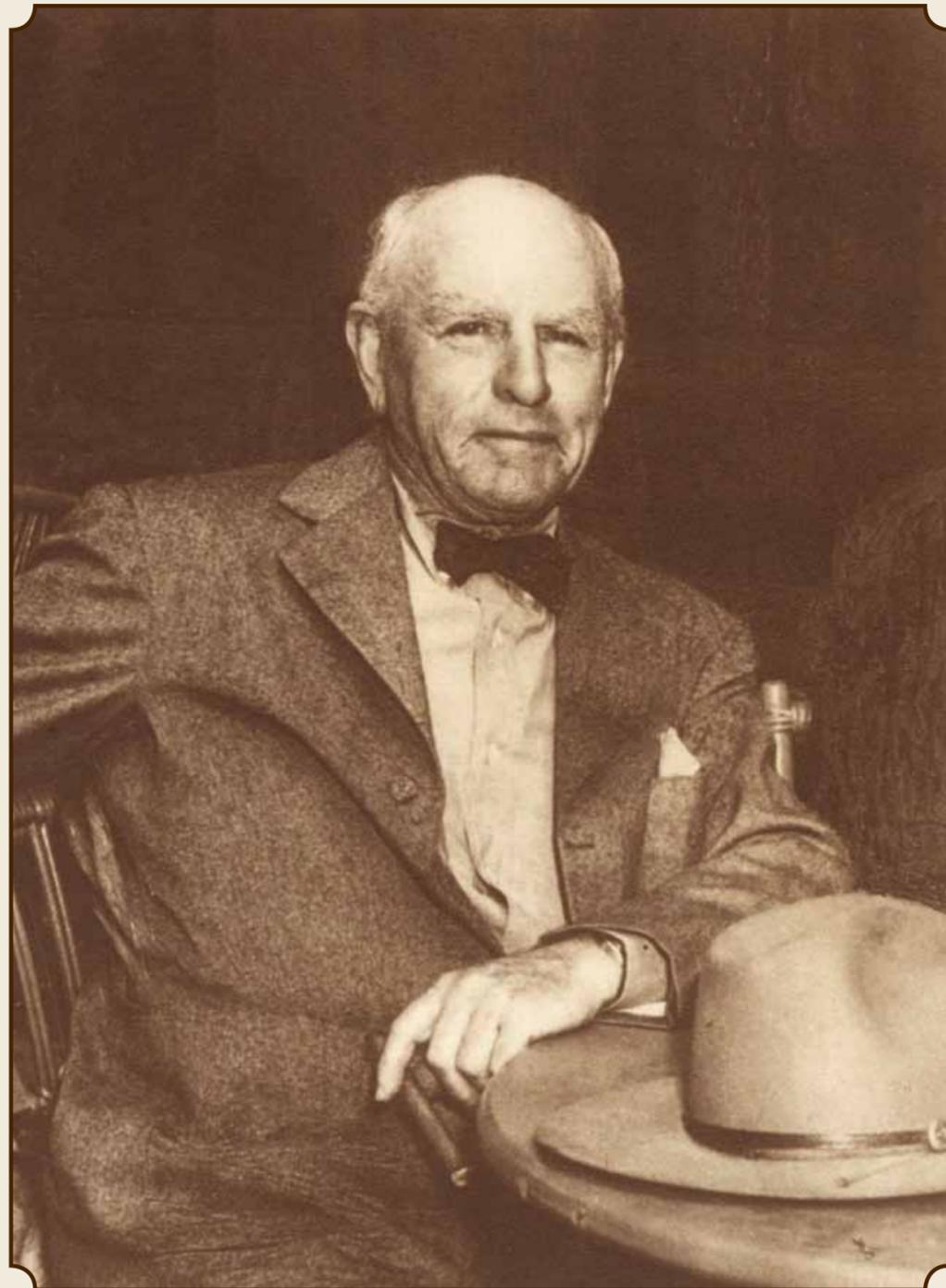


*Artifacts found at site.
Amber Glass Flask, 1870s*

This small adobe, as it now stands, and the courtyard walls were built sometime after 1855, at the height of the rancho operation. An archaeological excavation conducted through the floor of the

small adobe found the remains of an older adobe structure possibly built in the 1840s, as well as artifacts related to rancho life. Although there were likely other small adobe buildings on the site when

the Olivas family lived here, this is the only small adobe structure remaining. The courtyard served as the center of family life and ranch business. Lavish fiestas were held here, lasting as long as a week.



Portrait of Max Fleischmann

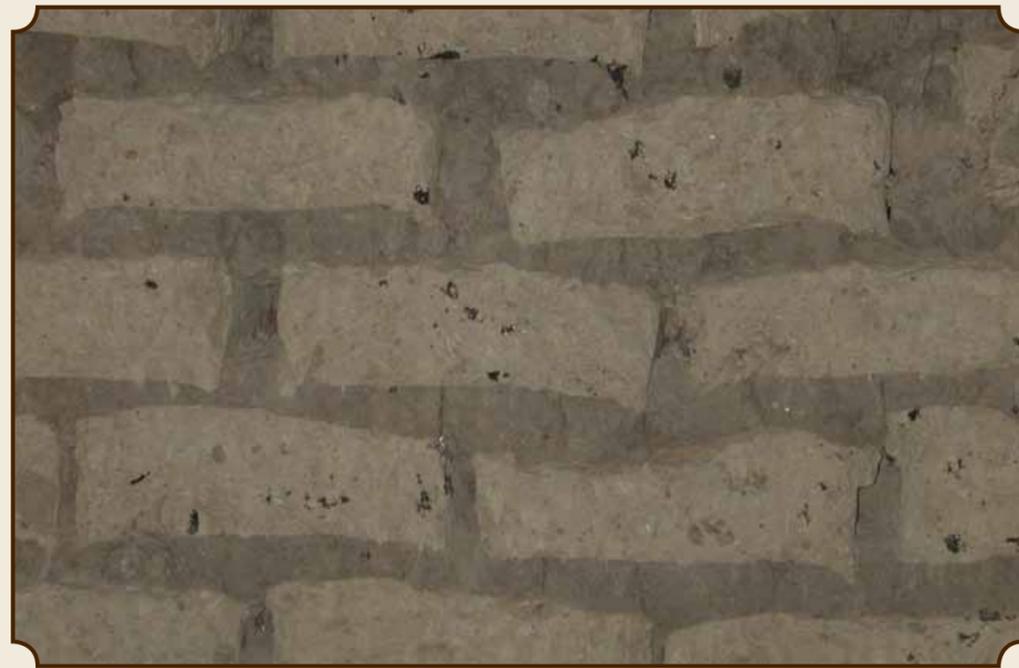
The Fleischmann Period

In addition to serving as the Olivas family home, the adobe has been a dairy and a hunting club. Max Fleischmann purchased and restored the house in 1927, building this distinctive bell arch over the main gate to the courtyard. Mr. Fleischmann maintained the property as his private hunting lodge. The adobe was given to the City, after the death of Max Fleischmann in 1951, by the Fleishmann Foundation in 1963 and made into an historic park in 1974, highlighting the many contributions of early Latino pioneers.



Bell gate created during the Fleischmann period with duck carvings.

Adobe Building Material



19th Century Adobe Bricks

Exposed bricks in this wall (behind the framed glass) are the original adobe bricks used in constructing the wall sometime after 1855. Adobe bricks are basically mud bricks, traditionally made from a mixture of mostly soil and water, with a small

amount of added sand and chopped straw (or recycled straw in the form of horse dung). The thick compound was then packed tightly into a wooden frame. When the frame was removed, the brick was left to dry in the sun for many days, turned occasionally.

A typical adobe brick from the original construction measures approximately 22" by 11" by 4½" and weighs about 25 pounds. The nine rooms of the main house are composed of about 2,000 or more bricks per room.

Adobe Repair Work

Traditional Materials

Special care was given to using traditional materials of adobe construction during the 2010 renovation and seismic strengthening of the historic house and courtyard walls. Contemporary plasters and paint can damage adobe bricks by trapping moisture, while use of traditional mud and lime materials allow the adobe bricks to breathe.

Layers: Behind this glass you can see the various layers of repair work on this wall. Portions of the wall had deteriorated and needed to be replaced.

❶ The replacement adobe bricks are made of soil mixed with water, and small amount of sand and organic material (chopped straw). Adobe mud mortar consisting of sand, soil and water was used to fill the void between the new adobe bricks and the existing adobe wall.

❷ The outer layer of replacement adobe bricks on this wall was attached



to the existing 19th century adobe wall with stainless steel rods in a rectangular grid pattern (see metal cap).

Two coats of lime plaster—crushed limestone heated in a kiln, plus sand and water—were applied:

❸ one rough coat and

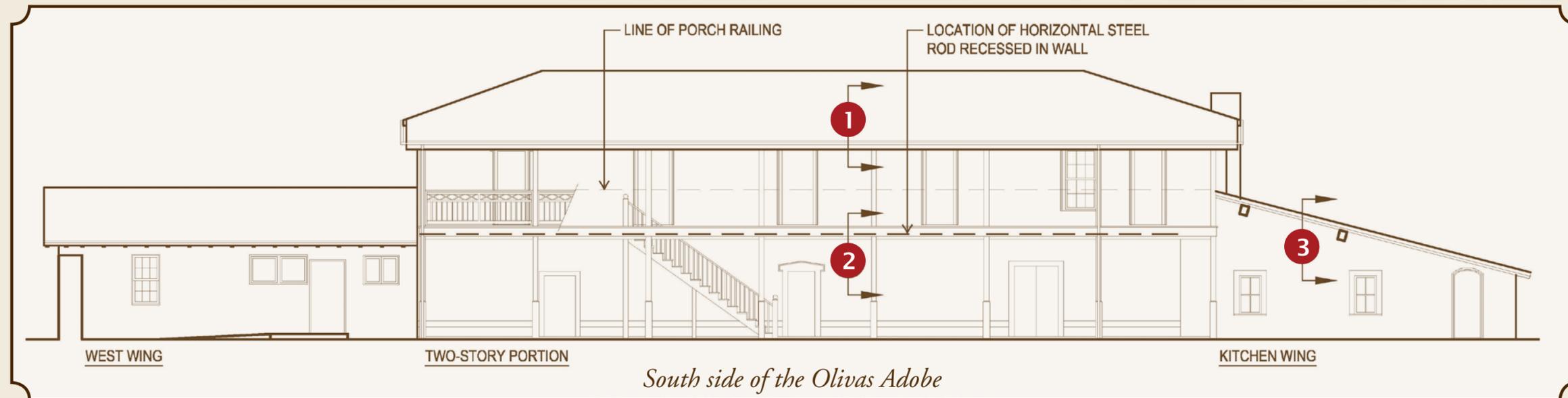
❹ a second smoother finish layer with finer grain sand.

❺ Finally, the lime plaster was covered with two coats of thin whitewash—a finish made of finely ground lime and water, with a small amount of a glue-like binder added.

The outer courtyard wall surfaces were repaired with mud mortar applied to the 19th century adobe brick surfaces, and then covered with two layers of lime plaster and whitewash.

The repair process for the two-story house was slightly different, using the traditional construction methods originally used for the house: The adobe brick surfaces were repaired with mud mortar and then covered with two layers of mud plaster (a rough layer and a smooth finish layer). This was followed by four coats of a thin whitewash finish.

Seismic Strengthening of the Adobes



The Large and Small Adobes have been strengthened to improve safety and reduce potential damage in the event of an earthquake. The main approach was to tie the adobe walls and wood-framed floors and roof together so that they move in similar ways in response to any ground motion.

- 1 Attaching the roof to the walls:** Two-foot long vertical steel rods were driven into the top of the adobe walls and bolted to the rafters.
- 2 Attaching the walls to the floor:** Brackets attached to the second floor framing were anchored to a horizontal steel rod recessed into the plaster on the outside of the wall, just under the second floor porch. The floors were also bolted together through the interior walls between rooms.
- 3 Strengthening roof and walls:** The roof was strengthened by adding plywood sheathing over the framing. The walls were also strengthened along the top, either with steel straps attached to the roof framing and adobe wall, or with a reinforced concrete cap, called a “bond beam” installed on the adobe just under the roof framing.

