

Published September 1st, 2021

Friends get a little academic help

By Sora O'Doherty



Restoration plans are being solidified at Moraga Adobe.

According to Mendoza, both structures are excellent examples of the Monterey Colonial style, a popular architectural style from the 1840s.

Of particular concern to the professor is the addition of concrete by developer J&J Ranch in the process of restoring the Moraga Adobe. He explained that concrete is really problematic for adobe, because it can prevent the building from "breathing" and result in the accretion of moisture. Moisture, he says, is the enemy of adobe, causing it to crumble. There are two areas of concrete that caused his concern: an abutment surrounding the front of the adobe and a layer of thinset on the floor of the main room inside. The concrete abutment could be good for the adobe, providing stabilization, but only if constructed such that water drains away from the building. If water pools next to the building, it will enter the walls and cause damage.

Although he didn't like the thinset on the floor in the main room, he was also concerned about the effects of removing it, especially if it involved the use of jackhammers. He suggested that a traditional building technique for adobes could be imitated by cutting trenches in the thinset and then adding large joists in the trenches to which wooden planks could be attached to form the floor. The Friends want to have a strong floor suitable for dancing, much like when the original adobe was used to host fandangos.

Teresa Long, at the FJMA meeting, said that the original plans submitted to the city of Orinda for the restoration of the Adobe had joists supporting the floors, not concrete. The Friends have written to the developer about their concerns about the restoration methods, and sent a copy to the city. Long added that the city is "a little worked up" because they were not consulted about changes in the plans.

Mendoza advocates keeping some elements of the Adobe that were added in the 1840s or 1860s. For example, the Friends were concerned that the carved wood lintels were out of place in the Adobe, but Mendoza urged the Friends to retain them because they are emblematic of a style seen throughout the Americas at that period. He also suggested that any timberwork be retained, if not in situ, then elsewhere, to be studied as part of the fabric of historical legacy.

In Mendoza's opinion, the whole building is historic and it shouldn't be returned strictly to its 1841 footprint. As to roofing, he suggests redwood as an appropriate roofing material, noting that Mission style tiles would be out of character. Mendoza says that he was very impressed with the heroic effort to save this adobe, calling it an amazing feat to raise the money to purchase and run the adobe.

Concerns about the restoration efforts may have an effect on the closing of the transaction that will give the Friends title to the building. Vice President Tania DeGroot reminded the group that the contract states that J&J Ranch must complete the restoration work within two years of payment.

Prior to the final payment by the Friends to the builder, on Aug. 24, Moraga Historical Society President Susan Sperry presented a check to FJMA for the final installment of the \$100,000 raised by MHS to help save the Moraga Adobe. In 2013, the MHS pledged to raise 20% of the funds needed to purchase the Adobe. The FJMA has acknowledged the participation of the MJS as a very significant partnership leading to satisfaction of the goal of acquiring the Adobe for the benefit of the community.

The Friends are excited to now focus on the next phases of the Adobe project. As the rehabilitation of the Adobe building is being done, the group is busy making plans and formalizing ideas for museum exhibits,

landscaping, site features, and the creation of an Adobe operating team. Two committees have been formed, the Museum Committee and the Adobe Site Operating Committee and volunteers are always welcome. Those interested in helping to plan Lamorinda's newest museum (in the oldest house in Contra Costa County), should contact TeresaLong@MoragaAdobe.org.



Photos provided



Photos provided

Reach the reporter at: sora@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA