



THE OLD SPANISH RANCH HOUSE
Which stands as a relic of the days of the Dons

OLD SPANISH ESTATE

[Reprint from the Los Angeles Times]

A Community Where No House Can Violate the Old California Traditions of Beauty

By LEE SHIPPEY

The last of the historic Spanish land grants of San Diego county to retain its pre-American atmosphere is to be preserved as a shrine to California's historic past, a parklike region containing nearly twenty square miles, teeming with mementoes and suggestions of the princely days when the old dons lived in California in almost feudal splendor; of Fremont and Stockton and Kearny and Kit Carson; of Ramona and Alessandro and the padres who proved that the bravest are the kindest—all in the midst of the peace and plenty and beauty for which their vision laid the foundations.

And, strange to say, this sentimental undertaking is being carried through by a "soulless corporation."

Don Juan Mario Osuna, soldier, judge and first alcalde of San Diego, was a man of the soundest taste in wines and horses and lands and ladies, and when he was invited to select 10,000 acres, more or less, to be granted to him and his heirs forever to encourage the upbuilding—in this western land, of noble houses equal to the aristocracy of Europe, he ranged far and wide before he finally chose a 9000-acre tract in what is now the northern part of San Diego county. The San Dieguito River watered it, friendly mountains guarded it closely, but the sea was visible through their canyons, to the west, and to the north, in winter, the snow-topped San Bernardino mountains gleamed like far towers seen through a veil of dreams. It was the very heart of the country which, in recent years, Owen Wister and Peter B. Kyne have loved to work in, because of its beauty and tranquility.

There Don Juan built himself an adobe manor house which still stands in the shade of majestic pepper trees as ancient as itself, a fine example of the way the country gentlemen of that day used to live. It is simple yet full of dignity. Its walls are a good three feet thick. Its windows are inset so far that the sills make excellent seats, on both sides. Its terrace is broad and long enough to provide dancing space for a numerous company. It is a one-story house, but, its ceilings are high and its rooms capacious, and it looks out, through a vista of palms and pepper trees, on a lovelier picture than ever yet was painted, framed in by purple mountains.

The old military road from San Diego to Los Angeles ran through the estate, then known as Rancho San Dieguito, and on one prominent knoll in it the watch was kept by soldiers who rode both ways from it on long patrols in times of danger. Over that road Fremont marched in later years, and Kearny's men followed it into San Diego after the battle of San Pasqual. The old road still may be traced.

The ranch played an important part in the war with Mexico. Leandro Osuna, then its owner, was a bitter antagonist of the Americans. In the first encounter of the battle of San Pasqual it was he who saved the life of Gen. Pico by running Capt. Moore of the American force through with a lance just as Moore was about to shoot Pico in hand-to-hand combat. After the war Leandro Osuna committed suicide rather than submit to the Americans. The dream of his family had been of a landed aristocracy, and he feared the Americans would deprive him of his beloved ranch for his part against them.

When the Santa Fe Railroad interests bought Rancho San Dieguito sixteen years ago and changed its name to Rancho Santa Fe, it was feared by the lovers of California's past that the old place soon would lose its historic atmosphere. But W. E. Hodges of Santa Barbara, vice-president of the Santa Fe System, was struck by both the history and the beauty of the estate and through his efforts it finally was decided to subdivide it into several hundred tracts for orchardists and farmers, but to so restrict them that not only would the old ranch house and all the other relics of the past be preserved, but all the new buildings erected should also seem a part of the romantic past.

The result is the most restricted agricultural community in the world. Indeed, it probably is the most restricted area of its size of any kind in the world. In the most exclusive residence districts of cities the restrictions are mostly financial. One cannot build a residence costing less than a certain sum. But on Rancho Santa Fe one cannot build any residence or any other structure which is not in harmony with the whole area. The determination is that every resident in that twenty square miles may look out of any window of his home, in any direction, and see nothing but beauty.

A SPANISH GUEST HOUSE

The Santa Fe is setting the pace for that. It has built a guest house and civic center so perfect in Spanish type that a man who found himself sailing over them in an airplane might well believe he had drifted over some lovely suburb of Seville. Seen from any point of the area, they present the same picturesque impression, the same suggestion of beauty and harmony and tranquility. Inside, those buildings have every modern American appliance and yet their romantic atmosphere is preserved. In the guest house, La Morada (the home), for instance, every bedspread, cushion, curtain and light shade, as well as special features, has been specially designed. The hall lights look like the rusted lanterns by the castle gates in ancient days, though the light, of course, is electricity.

When you go into La Morada you do not see any desk, any cigar case nor any bellhops. A hostess comes out and greets you as if you were entering her salon. You are invited to sit down in one of the big chairs before the hearth. But, for all its hospitality, La Morada doesn't seek tourists or sightseers. It is not really a hotel but a guest-house for people who are thinking of settling in Rancho Santa Fe. Others are welcome to stay for dinner or over night, but longer than that they are not encouraged to tarry.

SOL DE MI VIDA

The skyline one sees from La Morada is oddly suggestive of that around Mexico City, and there are other things which make one who has visited in Mexico or Cuba or Spain drift into reveries. Just looking up through the smoke of one's "puro," in the big room which in ordinary hotels would be a lobby, one catches sight of a balcony so reminiscent of other lands that one half expects to see a long-lashed, fan-guarded senorita with hair which would have made Godiva's seem thin step out to smile encouragement to a serenader. I know, at least, that as I gazed on it thus I suddenly awoke to find myself humming—

Sol de mi vida
Del corazon,
No me desprecies,

Da me tu amor;
Si tu me olvidas
El sol se obscura—

or words to that effect, even if not exactly to that spelling. I learned the song by ear only, from hearing it sung under many a balcony in the sunny and romantic land to the south of us.

Then as one steps out on the terrace one is inevitably reminded of "los portales" in the beautiful old castle of Chapultepec, a palace far more inspiring to the eyes than Versailles or Fontainebleau and probably unrivaled for commanding outlook and beautiful surroundings by any other in the world.

THE LANDSCAPE SCHEME

The owners have undertaken, in short, to make Rancho Santa Fe a monument to California's past as well as expressive of faith in its future, and though simplicity has been the keynote of the whole development perfection has been the aim. The whole great area now has the appearance of having been landscape gardened, the fifty miles of surfaced roads which have been built through it all being designed to outline and accentuate its beauties; its native flowers, shrubs and trees being preserved in lovely groupings and its modern conveniences being so camouflaged as to be unseen.

The 9000 acres have been sub-divided into tracts of from five to forty acres, but even the plantings have been restricted with a view to color scheme and harmony. Horticultural and agricultural experts, engineers and landscape artists have gone over every acre carefully. The soil has been analyzed and the restrictions are designed to "insure" prosperity. But they are designed no less to preserve beauty and harmony and atmosphere.