





EL ANDALUZ

2009

The site where EL Andaluz now sits was a used-car lot for most of my life. Dan, Leon and I had just completed Cota Street Studios (see page 63) as well as two projects outside of the Fig District, Laguna Vieja and the Small Cow House, and we wanted to do another. They had me look at a lot near Five Points, almost four miles from my office, which was too far away for me. We then looked at a site on Milpas Street, eight blocks away. Luckily, they found a lot even closer to my office, the old car lot on lower Chapala Street, just a Frisbee throw away from my back patio.

Left: Entry bridge detail.

Fig.43: Watercolor of bridge panels.









Early Concept Sketches (2006-2007) Mixed Media





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Fig. 44

The three-story front façade of El Andaluz could have been daunting and unwelcoming. To soften the experience from the sidewalk, we created an arcade of tiled elliptical arches along Chapala Street to open the building up to the pedestrian. We also pierced the building with a large entryway from the sidewalk to the central courtyard in order to add a sense of mystery for the passer-by.

The hand-painted wooden bridge that spans this opening



also serves as the living room of a third-floor unit. The underside of the bridge is dressed with hand-painted panels by artist Cara Cummings, and I painted the beams and the bridge façade over a few weekends, with a pair of headphones and a six-pack of beer.

The beams have citrus eating salamanders and the wood panels have radiating flowers. The salamanders were originally painted as snakes, but as the units started to sell, it turned out a few of the new owners didn't like the snakes, thinking they had some sort of evil connotation. So I got back up on the tall ladder and gave the snakes little legs and feet, turning them into friendly and tranquil salamanders.

Figure 44: Clipping taken from the construction documents drawing of the underside of the wooden bridge. Watercolor and graphite.

Left: View from Chapala Street into the entryway and beyond to the interior courtyard. The cascading steel-andneon chandelier hanging from the center of the bridge was designed and crafted by David Shelton, with the neon was created by the late, great Juan De La Cruz.

Right: Looking southwest to the courtyard's central fountain.

Following Page: Chapala Street facade.











Fig. 45: A loggia section floating above the building on its way to the courtyard.



The central courtyard provides semi-private outdoor space and beautiful natural light to all seven units, and exotic fruiting trees fill tiled planters. Two-story loggias, or covered porches, surround the courtyard and are made from one-inch thick galvanized steel, with piercings and perforations based loosely on memories of tracery I had seen in southern Spain and Morocco.

I presented the loggia idea to Leon and Dan one afternoon in my office, depicted in four loose pencil sketches on tracing paper (Fig. 46 & 47). The loggias were designed to be made up of twelve sections, each at six feet six inches wide, eight feet deep, and twenty-six feet six inches tall. Leon fidgeted in his seat during my presentation as we were over budget and behind schedule and he was looking at some new idea that surely would cost a lot more than was budgeted. As soon as I was done talking, he said, "We are NOT doing this!" Dan said, "I get it. Let's do it."

The loggias were fabricated in Santa Fe Springs just south



Interior Courtyard, looking northeast through the entry towards Chapala Street.

of Los Angeles, and were galvanized in the largest hot-dip galvanizing tank in California, which was conveniently seven feet wide, eight feet deep, and twenty-seven feet long. We had six inches to spare on each side. Upon final installation, the finished pieces needed to be craned into place and bolted together (Fig. 45).

The seven residential units overlook the central courtyard, four on the second floor, and three on the

third. Four of the units, as well as the two ground-floor commercial units, face Chapala Street. Besides having spectacular views of the Santa Ynez Mountains, we located these units on this north façade to bring life and eyes to the street.

Figures 46 & 47: Interior courtyard sketches with galvanized loggias.





Fig. 48

Knowing nothing about the difficulty of producing enormous ceramic urns, I designed ten of them, six feet tall, to hang off of the courtyard's steel loggias. Leon looked at the drawings and asked, "What are these?" I said, "I don't know. Some kind of ceramic urn I guess." The urns were certainly easy to sketch and watercolor, but once they were approved by the Review Board, we had to build them. Luckily, Leon had friends in the UCSB Art Department, Ken Yokota and Sheldon Kaganoff, who were up for the challenge. They came into my office with great enthusiasm to show me a sample urn they had made. It was only I8 inches tall, as they hadn't comprehended the scale. I felt like I was in *Spinal Tap*. After clarification and several attempts, Ken and Sheldon were able to produce fifteen beautiful urns to choose from, all of them six feet tall.

Left: Looking northeast through interior courtyard toward Chapala Street.

Figure 48: Loggia and tile concept sketch.

Fig. 49: Watercolor sketches of the courtyard urns were enlarged to ten full-scale prints and delivered to the ceramicists.







Fig. 50



The ironwork took a giant step forward at El Andaluz. Balconies and railings always start as pencil sketches and scribbles on concept elevations, and on this building, the sketches kept appearing heavier and more pronounced than normal. I trust my pencil and pen; the size and strength of the ironwork needed to compliment the size and scale of the building. I ended up drawing some extremely difficult guardrails and pergolas, and instead of complaining about the impossible ironwork gymnastic maneuvers that would need to be performed, David Shelton made the cold blue steel look like melting licorice.

Figure 50: Watercolor of "Irish Roads" stair riser tile. The tile design is based on the fuchsia flower that grows along the roads in Ireland.

Figure 51: Watercolor of "Nasturtiums" stair riser tile.



Ironwork Construction Documents (2008) Graphite



The elliptical arches along Chapala Street were inspired by the arches at La Mezquita in Cordoba, Spain. When we obtained design approval for El Andaluz, Dan, Leon and I headed to the bar at Paradise Café to celebrate, as usual after victories or defeats. Before the drinks came, Dan asked, "So, how are we going to build the damn arches?" I said, "I have no idea."

The arches were elliptical and so each tile would have to be custom made. Since we couldn't afford custom tile, we came up with the notion that the grout joints between tiles could all be wider than usual and the joint sizes could vary. I had seen this casual attitude toward grout at the Alhambra in Granada, Spain. If wide joints were acceptable at the Alhambra, then they would work here.

We then decided to make narrow one by eight inch tiles that could be spaced to help make the elliptical bend. The tile finish needed to have some depth, but hand-painted tiles were also unaffordable, so we came up with the idea of flicking and pouring glaze on them à la Jackson Pollock. We then mixed up the finished tiles, and randomly installed them on the arches.

Dan's crew was swamped with the amount of tile work at El Andaluz, so Dan hired a former student he'd taught in the third grade, Wendelin Wagner, for the arch job. She was now a science teacher and needed work for the summer, and it didn't matter to Dan that she'd never set tile before. Dan returned to his teaching post, showed Wendelin what to do, and the tiles were in place in five weeks. Now everyone calls Wendelin for tile projects.

Right: Saul's caramel lamps drip out of a ceiling crawling with oversized ant tiles.



Elliptical Arch Detail Drawing (2008) Graphite









Benches on the sidewalk are provided for pedestrians to take a rest. All projects should have benches for people who want to sit and slow down. At El Andaluz, there is a Citrus Bench, a Nut Bench and an Animal Bench.

Ceramicist Elizabeth Olson showed up one day with animal tiles she had crafted for the Animal Bench, and Andy Johnson mounted his limestone horse heads to the corners. Andy came back the next day and installed a small limestone Nut Thief, who now hides in the small arched niche below the bench eating his stolen nut.

- Left: The piercings on the galvanized balcony mimic the lace on Spanish veils and Flamenco dresses, and a staircase wraps itself around a Date Palm.
- Above: The Animal Bench with nut thief below.





Street bench concept sketches (2008) Pencil and ink on grid paper









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> *Opposite & Figure 52:* As the wall terminates at the corners of the roof, the plaster is molded into bird apartments. *Figures 53, 54:* Concept sketches for rooftop penthouses.

I he ferro-cement roof finials shaped like pots and urns and bird houses were crafted by Karl Swanson, who worked in my office and did the lion's share of the construction documents on this project. These pots were just another of the many parts of this building that I drew up and got approval for, but that no one knew how to build. So Karl went up to the roof and figured it out.

Throughout the project, Duke Richards and David Kruger would call me over to the site to approve a plasterer's interpretation of a bump or a slump. Having the project I50 feet from my office made daily inspections easy to do. I once received a call from David asking me to look at a plaster detail behind a chimney on the roof near a vent that no one would ever see, but David had found it in a detail in a far upper corner of the plans. He would apologize when a plaster bump, scaled to be about three inches on the plans could only be made two and a half inches.

As on all projects, everyone sprints to the finish line and then collapses with exhaustion. Luckily, we have short memories and forget about the pain and move on to the next project.

