

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The New Sancho Panza

One of the pleasant things that has happened in Monterey recently was the renovation of the Guterrez Adobe at 590 Calle Principal, an historical monument, supervised by the division of Beaches and Parks. It is another link in the chain that binds Monterey to California's historic past.

Last week Mr. Leo Nieto invited the Board of Directors of the Monterey History and Art Association to be his guests at the old adobe.

Champagne and other goodies were served in the charming rear garden facing Pacific street, where the fountain played into the pool below. Later the guests were invited into the dining room to enjoy a typical Mexican dinner.

Because his own roots are in Mexico, Leo Nieto's dream from the beginning was to make Sancho Panza a Mexican country inn and thereby create at Casa Guterrez an aura reminiscent of its origin.

Little needed to be done to the beautifully proportioned dining room except to sand old grime from the wide plank floors, refinish the shutters and whitewash the thick adobe walls.

Extensive renovation was necessary in the kitchen for the sake of convenience and in order to bring the area into line with health regulations.

The patio surrounding the Arch Garner fountain has been paved with a combination of cement, decomposed granite, and used brick. The patio furniture, built by Mr. Nieto from his own design, brings to the Casa a permanent reminder of Monterey's more recent though no less colorful past.

All of the tables and benches are made from hatch covers and other timbers salvaged, with the help of George Leutzinger and Wesley Dodge, from Cannery Row's old sardine boats.

Plantings in the patio are not yet complete. It is hoped that flowers and bushes characteristic of Monterey's earlier gardens will eventually flourish there.

The white washed stucco wall topped by red tiles in the manner of old Mexico was also built by Mr. Nieto. Wrought iron gates complete the picture.

Now for a bit of the life of Mr. Nieto. He was born in a spacious hacienda near the village of Temescal in San Luis Potosi district of central Mexico. His family's comfortable existence was shattered during the time of Mexico's revolutionary uprisings when Pancho Villa and his lieutenants rode into the courtyard one day and suggested Senor Nieto make his contribution to the cause.

While some of Villa's men rounded up the livestock, others busily collected furniture and food. The family struggled northward to the United States, bringing with them only Senora Nieto's Singer sewing machine and two suitcases of paper money which they were able to hide from the raiders, but which proved worthless when they reached California.

Upon growing up Leo worked his way through Fresno State College and served in the Air Force during World War II.

He then taught for a time. He has raised three sons on the Peninsula, supporting his family by working as a waiter and as manager of Su Vecino Restaurant when it was owned by his brother, August Nieto, in Carmel.

We welcome Leo Nieto to Monterey and to Casa Guterrez and hope for him a happy new life and a very successful business life here. He serves luncheon and dinner both indoors and outside in the lovely patio.

The Monterey History and Art Association thank him most sincerely for the evening he gave us in the old adobe, it was our great pleasure.

NOTE: Correct spelling for the adobe is Gutierrez.