

Stately Homes of California
Porter Garnett,
Little, Brown, and Company, Boston, MA.
1915

Chapter III
Hacienda Del Pozo De Verona, Residence of Mrs. Phoebe A. Hearst

“Surmounting one of the low, wide-stretching hills of the Livermore Valley, a short distance inland from the Bay of San Francisco, stands a picturesque, castle-like structure, the "Hacienda del Pozo de Verona," residence of Mrs. Phoebe A. Hearst.

The white walls of the building, accented by two commanding towers, rise above the trees—dark evergreen conifers, white oaks, cork elms — which richly clothe the hills' lower slopes, their higher and more distant ascents forming a forested background. The main entrance to the "Hacienda" is on the side away from the valley, and is reached by a circuitous road which, when it finally enters the grounds, becomes a palm-lined avenue. The spacious and beautiful vista to be had from the eminence on which the mansion stands possesses, in spite of its vastness, an intimacy that charms the eye.

Its panoramic character does not lessen its beauty nor is one overwhelmed by its expanse. Vineyards and fields under cultivation are spread upon the plain and, upon the gently undulating hills on the farther side of the valley, those portions which have not known the plowshare were, when the writer first saw them in early spring, like oak-studded lawns. Even Monte del Diablo, which rises mistily in the distance, has none of that austere beauty which mountains usually possess and which demands a certain mood for its enjoyment.

Spaciousness without austerity, which is characteristic of the landscape around the "Hacienda del Pozo de Verona," is characteristic too of its exterior and its interior. The house grounds which one would judge to be about thirty acres in extent, are part of a five-hundred-acre tract and are inclosed by a square-cut cypress hedge which clambers up the irregular contour of the hillside very much as the Great Wall clambers over the mountains of China. In front of the mansion stretch lawns picked out with ornamental plants, while behind it, the tree-covered hillside facing the valley proves upon closer inspection to be, in that portion of it immediately adjacent to the house, a succession of rock terraces, threaded with winding paths and thickly set with flowers. The architecture of the "Hacienda del Pozo de Verona" is Spanish in character, but it is not of the type with which we are generally familiar in California and from which the so-called Mission style has been derived. For Mrs. Hearst's residence the term "Hispano-Moresque" would be more accurately descriptive. The original building, as to style, plan, and arrangement, is the work of the late A. C. Schweinfurth; the extensive additions were designed by Miss Julia Morgan.

The walls of the house, finished in white stucco, support a roof of red Spanish tiles. Although accented by decorative grilles in front of the windows of the second story and of the towers, the wall surfaces retain their simplicity. The grilles, however, give to the building an interesting and distinctive character further enhanced by the essentially Spanish device of gutters that pierce and project beyond the walls, and by the red earthen pots placed at intervals along the parapets. These grilles represent one of the many decorative uses of iron to be seen in both the exterior and the interior of the structure. The lower gateway, for example, is spanned by an ornamental, wrought-iron arch which springs from the two round towers. The windows of the latter are covered with grilles of intricate design. The gates themselves are studded with iron bolts, and have decorative hinge-plates and other fittings.

To enter the house by the main door, one must first pass into the patio or courtyard, planted in lawn and flanked on either side by vine-grown pergolas. In the center stands a beautiful marble well-head of Veronese workmanship, from which the "Hacienda del Pozo de Verona" takes its name. In the antique, damascened lock and ornamental hinge-plates of this principal door, one may see a refined expression of the metalcraft which everywhere within will invite attention. The hall is a long, low-ceiled room finished in mahogany, to which a quality of intimacy and ease is given by the great central fireplace and the book-strewn table. Ornaments meet the eye on all sides, but the room is furnished with a view to comfort as well as elegance. From the hall, situated approximately in the center of the building, the house extends to right and left a total distance of almost seven hundred and fifty feet. This great length necessitates two connecting corridors, running respectively to the east and west ends of the building. Immediately to the west of the main hall is the small dining room. From this a grand corridor extends to the west in which end of the house are situated, on the first floor, the owner's summer apartments, the children's playroom and the swimming-tank in an adjacent structure. This corridor separates the kitchen, the pantries, and the servants' hall from the rest of the house; it also opens upon the state dining room.

Leaving the main hall again but in the other direction, one enters first the blue sitting room and, passing through two libraries and along the east corridor, reaches the largest and most important room in the mansion — the music room. On this floor and opposite the various living apartments just mentioned, there are a number of bedchambers, some of which face the patio. Two stairways at the east and west ends of the corridors lead to the second story where, in addition to the owner's winter suite, there are the rooms of the members of the household and a large number of guest chambers.

The "Hacienda del Pozo de Verona" is as much a dwelling as it is a mansion. It is, in fact, a dwelling within a mansion. The inevitable impression conveyed by a residence of which the apartments are as spacious as many of those at the "Hacienda" is that the persons who live in them and many of the things which we commonly associate with family life must be, in a sense, extinguished by the overwhelming scale of the surroundings. One can hardly be "cozy," for example, while reading by the fire in a room that measures forty by sixty feet. Such rooms demand numbers, and at the "Hacienda"

numbers are happily supplied by the many who partake of the owner's lavish hospitality. Thus the artistic problem of the large room is charmingly solved.

It is neither desirable nor possible to speak specifically of even the notable objects of art with which the "Hacienda" is filled. I shall mention, therefore, only some that arrest the attention and remain in the memory. Chief among these are the cabinets, credences, and bahuts of which there are many beautiful specimens. There are no forms of furniture upon which more art and more skill have been lavished than those that come under the general classification of cabinets. To no other form has such nobility of design been given. No other form may be said so truly to include architecture, sculpture, and craftsmanship, the last term being employed here in its older and better sense.

Mrs. Hearst's cabinets represent some of the finest workmanship of the Renaissance in Italy, France, Spain, Flanders, and Germany: there are also several specimens from later periods. Equally interesting and beautiful in their own way are the numerous secretaries of various periods and countries. Everywhere in the mansion one sees rugs and tapestries possessed of a beauty in keeping with the interiors they serve to enrich; among them are many extremely rare and exquisite specimens of the weaver's art. Examples of ironwork which, as I have already said, give individuality to the ornamentation of the "Hacienda," are to be found in many delightful old locks and hinge-plates. The door of the state dining room and the fanlight above it are of Spanish wrought-iron, while the chiseled iron stand of a crucifix in the music-room is admirable in workmanship and design.

From the small dining room one passes through an antique carved door of great beauty into the west corridor, hung with paintings and splendid tapestries and ornamented with Delia Robbia reliefs. Here too are a few fine pieces of furniture and a handsome Louis XVI clock.

At the end of the west corridor a stairway descends to the children's playroom; near by one finds the swimming-pool the roof of which is glass, the frieze of Pompeian pattern. The plunge is twenty by forty feet and lined with green tiles.

The state dining room is an apartment of charming dignity. In it are portraits by Gainsborough, Romney, and Lawrence. The Gothic credence in this room is one of the rarest pieces in Mrs. Hearst's collection.

In the blue sitting room on the eastern side of the central hall modern tapestry is again employed in the decoration. The library contains an interesting collection of books, among them many illuminated manuscripts, the most unusual and interesting being perhaps the Persian.

The east corridor brings one finally to the door of the music room. This apartment is entered upon a platform some five feet above the level of the main floor. The room is, one would judge, about thirty-five feet wide by sixty long. The high, trussed ceiling, which rises to a skylight of yellow glass, admits a warm golden light. The walls are a

terra cotta red, and red tones enter largely into the furnishing and decorations. Among the most notable pieces of furniture are two large cabinets and a bombe Louis XVI escritoire.

Perhaps the most interesting piece, however, is an extremely rare Spanish vargueho cabinet. This represents the highest development of Hispano-Moresque decoration. Its door is shod with pierced ironwork, and its lock-plate, key, and fastenings are highly ornamental. The interior is elaborately carved, gilded, and enameled in designs peculiar to the period in which Spanish art was informed by Moorish influence. There are, besides chairs and tables, pieces of buhl, tarsia, and marquetry which must arrest the attention of any one interested in such things. Of the many paintings in the music room, one may mention a Lancret, two Corots, a Millet, an Isabey, a Jacque, a Detaille, and two Vereshchagins, one of which is "The Walls of Jerusalem."

Mrs. Hearst's collections are in all departments so extensive that to give the reader an idea of her residence, with the numberless, varied, rare, and beautiful objects it contains, without having recourse to the methods of the cataloguer, is a baffling task. The writer can only hope therefore to convey here a general and inadequate visual impression of the "Hacienda del Pozo de Verona."