AHWAHNEE HOTEL
Yosemite National Park
1 Ahwahnee Drive
Yosemite Valley
Yosemite Village
Mariposa County
California

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001
The Ahwahnee Hotel is a significant example of monumental rustic architecture and is one of the most recognized and iconic grand lodges in the National Park system. Situated at the edge of a spacious meadow at the foot of the Royal Arches formation at the eastern end of Yosemite Valley, the Ahwahnee Hotel’s massive, seven-story form is dwarfed by the granite cliffs that surround the hotel. Combining native rough-cut granite with acid-stained concrete that was designed to resemble wood, the Ahwahnee was designed both to blend with the surrounding environment and also to be a fireproof luxury hotel to attract wealthy visitors to Yosemite National Park. Constructed in 1926-27, the hotel was designed by architect Gilbert Stanley Underwood in a style that would later become known as the Rustic Style. The Ahwahnee’s interior spaces are no less striking than its exteriors, as the eclectic design scheme developed by interior designers Phyllis Ackerman and Arthur Upham Pope included unique period artwork executed throughout the interiors. Drawing upon both Art Deco and Arts & Crafts styles, the hotel’s interior design was inspired by the geometric designs of California Indian baskets, yet combined décor and furnishings from all over the world.

In addition to its architectural significance, the Ahwahnee is also significant for its association with the development of Yosemite and the National Park Service (NPS), as the hotel was conceived and promoted by Stephen T. Mather, the first director of the NPS. The hotel was constructed during the growth of automobile touring and the rise in popularity of national parks during the 1920s, and was also developed within the context of tourism and resort hotel development in California. The hotel is also significant as a hostelry that has hosted numerous dignitaries, celebrities, artists, and political figures throughout its history. The Ahwahnee was the last of the “grand lodges” to be constructed within the national parks, and its significance and character-defining features are still prominent today. The hotel was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1977, and it attained National
Historic Landmark status in 1987, listed as nationally significant for architecture (Criterion C) on both listings. The Ahwahnee developed area was also included as a significant contributing property in the 2006 Yosemite Valley Historic District nomination, listed as significant for association with historical events (Criterion A), and also for architecture (Criterion C).

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Project Information:  
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PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: August 1926 – July 1927

The cornerstone for the hotel was laid on August 1, 1926. Construction began immediately afterward, with plans to complete the hotel by December of that same year. However, due to delays in design and construction, the hotel was not completed until July of 1927, and the grand opening ceremony was held on July 14, 1927.

2. Architect and Designers:

Gilbert Stanley Underwood, Architect (1890-1960)

Gilbert Stanley Underwood was born in Oneida, New York in 1890, the only child of Fred and Jennie Underwood. After his father passed away when he was a child, Underwood and his mother moved to San Bernardino, California. Underwood enrolled in San Bernardino High School in 1906 but did not graduate. Instead, in 1908, at the age of eighteen, he began working as a draftsman for Anthony Beimer, a San Bernardino Architect. After moving to Los Angeles in 1909, Underwood worked in the offices of architects Franklin Burnham, Arthur Benton, and Arthur Kelly, gaining exposure to the American Arts & Crafts Movement and Mission Style.
architecture. In 1912, Underwood enrolled in the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he met his wife, Mary Elizabeth Smith. At the University of Illinois, Underwood also began a long friendship with fellow architecture student Daniel Hull, building a connection that would profoundly affect Underwood’s life. Hull would later become the Chief Landscape Architect for the National Park Service and would recommend Underwood for multiple projects. Although Underwood did not complete his degree at the University of Illinois, he resumed his studies in 1920 at Yale University, completing his undergraduate degree in 1921. Underwood subsequently enrolled in graduate school at Harvard, where he received his Master’s Degree in 1923.

Underwood’s architectural work in the national parks began in the early 1920s in Yosemite National Park. As the National Park Service embarked on a project to relocate the site of Yosemite Village, NPS officials realized that the necessary design work for the new administrative site was more than could be easily managed by NPS staff. In 1923, Daniel Hull advocated hiring architects from outside of the National Park Service to submit designs for the new buildings for Yosemite Village. He recommended his friend, Underwood, as architect. Underwood submitted sketch plans for both the administration building and the post office building. However, his plans were not initially well received, as NPS officials considered the designs to be too complex. Ultimately, a simplified version of Underwood’s design for the post office building was utilized, but the commission for the design of the administration building was given to Los Angeles-based architect, Myron Hunt.

In 1923, NPS Director Stephen T. Mather also worked in partnership with the Union Pacific Railroad to develop tourism facilities at parks in the Southwest, planning lodges to facilitate “loop tours” that included Zion, Bryce Canyon, and Grand Canyon National Parks. Once again at the recommendation of Daniel Hull, Underwood was hired as architect for the Union Pacific. In 1924-25, Underwood designed lodges for the railroad company at both Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks.

In 1925, Underwood received a commission from the Yosemite Park and Curry Company (YP&C Co.) to design the Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite National Park, a building which would become his most well-known work, exemplifying the “monumental rustic” style. The Ahwahnee, which was completed in 1927, was the most massive lodge that Underwood designed for a national park setting. However,

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2 Ibid., 11-12.
3 Ibid., 12-14.
4 Ibid., 24-27.
5 Ibid., 29-40.
6 Ibid., 27.
he also designed several smaller structures in the Arts & Crafts style, including a pavilion at Cedar Breaks, Utah (1924), a lodge in West Yellowstone, Montana (1926), the North Rim Lodge at the Grand Canyon (1927-28), and several cabins in Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks (1927-28). As architect for the Union Pacific, Underwood also designed more than twenty railroad depots between 1924 and 1931, completing stations in California, Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho, Colorado, Utah, Kansas, and Oregon.

While Underwood’s local railroad stations exhibited a variety of architectural styles, including Spanish Revival, Classical Revival, Rustic, and Tudor Revival, he established himself as an Art Deco designer with his designs for the Wilshire Tower Building in Los Angeles (1928) and the central office complex and railroad terminal for the Union Pacific Railroad in Omaha (1930). As the first Art Deco railroad station in the country, Omaha’s Union Station was seen by many at the time as “a daring and forward-looking structure” because the “modern” Art Deco style was a departure from the Classical style that was used for most public buildings at the time.

Despite his prolific early career, Underwood found himself without any commissions after the onset of the Great Depression. By 1932, he had disbanded his Los Angeles office and accepted employment with the federal government. Working as a federal architect, Underwood designed several post offices and courthouses throughout the Western United States, many of which embraced Art Deco and Spanish Revival design elements. Some of his largest federal projects included the San Francisco Mint (1936), and the Seattle and Los Angeles Courthouses (1938). In the early 1940s, Underwood worked with William Dewey Foster to design the U.S. War Department Building (now the First Unit of the State Department Building) in Washington, DC. He also designed an emergency housing project for war workers in Linda Vista, California during World War II. In 1947, Underwood became the Supervising Architect for the United States, a position he held until 1949.

During his employment with the federal government from 1932-1950, Underwood was forbidden from undertaking private architectural projects outside of his government position. However, this mandate did not stop him from continuously seeking outside design commissions. In 1936, Underwood designed the Sun Valley Lodge in Idaho for the Union Pacific, working with a team of draftsmen in the attic and the basement of his home so as not to alert his government supervisors of his activities. In 1938, Underwood designed the Williamsburg Lodge and York House,

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7 Zaitlin, Gilbert Stanley Underwood, 83-93, 103-107.
8 Ibid., 169-170.
9 Ibid., 115-127.
10 Ibid., 124-127.
11 Ibid., 135-137.
12 Ibid., 139-144.
two hotels for John D. Rockefeller, Jr.’s Colonial Williamsburg.\textsuperscript{13} After his retirement from the federal government in 1950, Underwood completed his final national park lodge: the Jackson Lake Lodge at Grant Teton National Park in Wyoming. Underwood retired from practice after the completion of the lodge in 1954, and he passed away in 1960 at age 70.\textsuperscript{14}

**Phyllis Ackerman, Interior Designer (1893-1977)**

Born in Oakland, California in 1893, Phyllis Ackerman was an author, educator, editor, and expert in Middle Eastern art, Gothic European textiles, Chinese bronzes, and iconography. Ackerman served as interior designer for the Ahwahnee Hotel and Cottages along with her husband, Arthur Upham Pope. As a student in mathematics at the University of California at Berkeley, Ackerman was recognized for her academic abilities. However, she changed her major to philosophy and aesthetics after taking courses from professor Arthur Upham Pope, who would later become Ackerman’s husband in 1920. After completing her Ph.D. in 1917, Ackerman authored and contributed to several academic books, including *Tapestry: The Mirror of Civilization; Wallpaper: Its History, Design, and Use*; and *The First Goddesses*. However, her most well-known contribution was as assistant editor of *A Survey of Persian Art*, a six-volume, 2800-page publication with more than seventy contributing authors, for which Pope served as editor. Between 1930-1953, Ackerman worked as an instructor of iconography and interpretation at the American Institute for Persian Art and Archaeology (later called the Asia Institute of New York), a postgraduate school established by Pope in 1928. During this time, Ackerman and Pope also bought and sold works of art to collectors and museums in order to fund the Institute, their writing projects, art exhibits, and expeditions to the Middle East. Ackerman collaborated with her husband in organizing four different International Congresses on Oriental Art, including the exhibition on Persian art for the U.S. Sesquicentennial Celebration and World’s Fair in Philadelphia in 1926. Later that year, Pope and Ackerman were commissioned to design the interiors of the Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite. The interior design of the Ahwahnee Hotel was an atypical job for Ackerman and Pope, since they did not typically work as interior designers; however, they did work as decorating consultants for private residences of several of their wealthy clients.

Throughout her life Ackerman was known as “a formidable woman,” and was a politically involved feminist who taught courses on the significance of masculine and feminine symbolism in art. In 1930, while in Cairo, Ackerman contracted a rare type of polio and lost her ability to walk. Despite an unpromising diagnosis, she taught herself to walk again at the age of 36. Throughout their lives, Pope and Ackerman maintained a close relationship with the Shah of Iran, Reza Pahlavi, and both moved to Shiraz in 1966. After her husband passed away in 1969, Ackerman remained in

\textsuperscript{13} Zaitlin, *Gilbert Stanley Underwood*, 149-159.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 163.
Iran until her death in 1977, living on a pension granted by the Persian government. Both Ackerman and Pope are buried in a mausoleum near Isfahan, Iran.15

Arthur Upham Pope, Interior Designer (1881-1969)

Arthur Upham Pope was a professor, editor, author, and art consultant who specialized in Persian art and advocated for the study of Middle Eastern art and culture throughout his life. Pope served as interior designer for the Ahwahnee Hotel along with his wife, Phyllis Ackerman. Born in Rhode Island in 1881, Pope studied philosophy at Brown University, where he received both Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees. There, Pope also met his first wife, Bertha Clark. After teaching for five years at Brown, Pope accepted a position in 1911 at the University of California at Berkeley, where he taught aesthetics. At Berkeley, Pope met Phyllis Ackerman, a student who worked with him in cataloguing an exhibition of Persian rugs for the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco. In 1917, the University discovered that the married Pope was having an affair with his student, Ackerman, and he subsequently lost his teaching job. Pope and Ackerman married in 1920 and moved to New York City, where Pope worked as a consultant and advisor in Persian art for the Pennsylvania Museum and the Chicago Art Institute. During this time, he published several articles on Asian and Middle Eastern carpets. Pope also bought and sold artifacts and works of art to wealthy collectors in order to fund his endeavors. In 1925, Pope made his first trip to Iran, where he met Shah Reza Pahlavi. Pope convinced the Shah of the benefits of restoring Persia’s historic architecture. Pope developed a life-long relationship with the Shah, a connection which enabled him to become the first non-Muslim to be granted permission to enter Muslim mosques to study and photograph their architecture.16 Pope organized four different International Congresses on Oriental Art, including the exhibition on Persian Art for the U.S. Sesquicentennial Celebration and World’s Fair in Philadelphia in 1926. Later that year, Pope and Ackerman were commissioned to design the interiors of the Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite.17

Pope’s most well-known accomplishments were the 1928 establishment of the American Institute for Persian Art and Archaeology (later called the Asia Institute of New York), and the 1938 publication of A Survey of Persian Art. The Survey was a six-volume, 2800-page publication with more than seventy contributing authors, for which Pope served as editor and Ackerman as assistant editor. Pope also conducted

17 Ibid.
several architectural surveys and archaeological excavations in the Middle East, and was a principal organizer of the International Exhibition of Persian Art at London’s Royal Academy of Arts in 1931. Pope continued to organize exhibits on Persian art throughout the 1930s and 1940s; however, in 1949 an article in *Life* magazine identified Pope along with several others as members of the Communist Left, and he was summoned to testify before the United States Subversive Activities Control Board led by Senator Joseph McCarthy. The ensuing loss of support for the Institute for Persian Art led to its demise in the United States; however, the Institute was revived in 1964 in Iran as part of the Pahlavi University in Shiraz. Pope moved to Shiraz in 1966, and passed away in 1969. He was buried in a mausoleum near Isfahan, where Ackerman was also subsequently interred after her death in 1977.18

**Dorothy Wood Simpson, Assistant Interior Designer (1890-1967)**

Dorothy Wood Simpson worked as an assistant to Ackerman and Pope in the interior design of the Ahwahnee Hotel, consulting on the design and furnishings and also preparing budgets and reports for the YP&C Co. Born in Ohio in 1890, Simpson moved to New York as a child. Her father, Lieutenant Colonel Wendell Lee Simpson, was the chief purchasing agent for the United States Army during the construction of the Panama Canal.19 After both of her parents passed away in 1913, Dorothy Wood Simpson moved to San Francisco circa 1920, and began working in the Bay Area as an interior designer. In 1926, when Simpson was commissioned by the YP&C Co. to consult with Ackerman and Pope on the Ahwahnee interior design, she had already established herself as a “well-known Pacific coast interior decorator,” and she operated out of an office at 807 Chestnut Street in San Francisco.20 Shortly after Simpson completed her design consultation work at the Ahwahnee, she made national headlines in 1930 when she met and married New York artist Paul Roland Dixon on board a transatlantic ship en route from London to New York.21 The ceremony to wed the two newly acquainted passengers was officiated by the ship’s captain; however, the marriage apparently did not last, as Simpson subsequently married San Francisco engineer Daniel Fee in 1932. Although it is unknown whether she completed additional interior design work in her later life, she remained in the Bay Area of California, residing in Saratoga until her death in 1967.

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20 “Hotel Ahwahnee Will Be Ready This Summer: Furnishings for Yosemite’s Fine Hotel Secured from Wide Sources,” *Stockton Record*, February 26, 1927, Yosemite National Park Archives, Historic Newspaper Collection, Box 7.

Trained in architecture and stained glass design, Jeannette Dyer Spencer worked as an artist and interior designer for the YP&C Co. for nearly fifty years. Born in Cleveland in 1892, Jeannette Dyer studied mathematics at Mather College in Ohio (now Case Western Reserve University), and she entered a graduate program in architecture at the University of California at Berkeley in 1915. However, when the onset of World War I interrupted her studies, Dyer supported the war effort by working as a materials engineer at the U.S. Navy Yard at Mare Island and also teaching Marine Architecture and Engineering for the University of California’s extension service. After the war, Dyer resumed her study of architecture at Berkeley, where she met and began a relationship with fellow architecture student, Eldridge “Ted” Spencer. Both Dyer and Spencer received Masters’ Degrees in 1920, and the two were married that same year. The Spencers relocated briefly to New York in 1920 before moving to Paris in 1921. In Paris, Jeannette studied stained glass design at the École du Louvre and Ted studied architecture at the École des Beaux Arts.22 Both Spencers received diplomas from their respective institutions in 1925 and returned to California, where Ted established an architecture office in Oakland.23 In 1927, Jeannette Dyer Spencer was invited to design ten stained glass panels for the windows in the Ahwahnee Hotel, which was under construction at the time. Phyllis Ackerman, a former classmate and sorority sister of Jeannette, sought Jeannette’s design expertise as an emergency remedy for the architect’s original window designs, which Ackerman deemed “execrable.”24 Jeannette’s successful completion of the intricate stained glass designs for the windows in the Ahwahnee’s Great Lounge commenced a relationship between the Spencers and the YP&C Co. which lasted for nearly fifty years. While working on the Ahwahnee interiors, Jeannette introduced her husband, architect Ted Spencer, to YP&C Co. president Donald Tresidder. After a series of disputes with Underwood during the construction of the Ahwahnee Hotel, Tresidder dismissed Underwood and hired Ted Spencer as company architect for the YP&C Co. in 1928. Ted Spencer’s first commission for the company was to design the eight Ahwahnee Cottages in that same year.

Both Ted and Jeannette Spencer continued their design and consulting work for the YP&C Co. in Yosemite National Park until 1972, with Ted working as architect and Jeannette working as interior designer. Typical of many marriages throughout the twentieth century in which both partners were trained in the art of architecture, Ted and Jeannette often collaborated with one another on building projects. Also typical of many of these partnerships, the roles that they each played reflected the gendered

24 Ackerman, Phyllis, Letter to P.M. Lansdale, San Francisco, California, March 16, 1927, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 3, Box 1, Folder 238.
nature of the profession in which men were believed to have innate skills more suited to the design of the exterior building envelope and women to possess skills more appropriate to interior design. The first major design work the Spencers completed as a partnership was at the Ahwahnee, where Ted’s exterior cottage designs were complemented by Jeannette’s hand-painted stencils, interior design work, and furnishings. Jeannette also contributed significantly to the interiors of the main Ahwahnee Hotel building, painting the Basket Mural over the fireplace in the elevator lobby and creating unique hand-painted stencil designs for the guest rooms, hallways, and the massive ceiling beams in the Great Lounge. In addition to her artistic contributions to the Ahwahnee Hotel, Jeannette Dyer Spencer also coordinated décor and costumes for the hotel’s annual Bracebridge Dinner, worked as a general design consultant for the YP&C Co., and collaborated with Ted Spencer as interior designer for several buildings he designed in Yosemite, including the Badger Pass Ski Lodge (1935) and the Yosemite Lodge (1956).

Robert Boardman Howard, Artist: Writing Room Mural (1896-1983)

Robert Boardman Howard painted the large toile peinte (“painted canvas”) mural that covers the entire top portion of the north wall of the Ahwahnee Writing Room. He also created the “Dancing Indian” kinetic sculpture that hangs in the Ahwahnee Bar. The son of architect John Galen Howard, Robert Boardman Howard was born in New York City in 1896 and moved to Berkeley as a young child. In his teen years, Howard was tutored by Arthur Upham Pope, and he later attended the California School of Arts and Crafts in Berkeley as well as the Art Students’ League in New York. During World War I, Howard was stationed in France with the Army. At the close of the war, he remained in Europe and spent several months traveling around the continent by bicycle, studying painting in the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, France, Greece, and Turkey before turning his attention to sculpture. A self-taught sculptor, Howard produced ornamental bas reliefs and murals for several buildings in California, including the Paramount Theatre in Oakland, the San Francisco Synagogue, the Guerneville Theatre, the San Francisco Stock Exchange Building, and the Coit Tower. In 1924, Howard spent three months camping and painting in Yosemite and the High Sierras along with fellow artists Worth Ryder and the well-known Yosemite painter Chiura Obata. In 1926, Howard’s former tutor, Arthur

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Upham Pope, commissioned him to produce several bas-relief replicas for the Persian Art Exhibition at the U.S. Sesquicentennial Celebration and World’s Fair in Philadelphia. Howard’s connection to Pope subsequently led to Howard’s creation of the Writing Room mural in the Ahwahnee in 1927. In 1930, Howard also designed a carved stone fireplace for the Camp Curry dining room in Yosemite, and in 1936, he created decorative cast-iron relief panels for the fireplace in Yosemite’s Badger Pass Ski Lodge. In 1951, Howard created the hanging sculpture for the Ahwahnee Bar (formerly the Indian Room, located in the original porte cochere).

Henry Temple Howard, Artist: Rubber tile floor mosaic designs (1894-1967)

The oldest son of architect John Galen Howard and brother of Robert Boardman Howard, Henry Temple Howard was an architect and artist who created the geometric, Native American-themed rubber tile floor mosaic designs in the Ahwahnee Hotel lobby. Born in New York City in 1894, Howard moved to Berkeley as a child. After graduating from Berkeley High School, Howard obtained both Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees in Architecture from the University of California at Berkeley. During World War I, Howard served in France for both the French Army and the U.S. Army. At the close of the war, Howard remained in Paris and attended the École des Beaux Arts until 1921. Howard worked as an architect in both San Francisco and New York City, contributing to the designs of the First Congregational Church of Oakland (1925), the LeConte School in San Francisco (1926), the Coit Tower (1931-34), and the Ping Yuen Housing Project in San Francisco’s Chinatown. Howard was married to French artist Jane Berlandia.30

Ernest Born, Artist: Concrete floor designs (1898-1992)

An architect, artist, and illustrator from San Francisco, Ernest Born designed the etched, acid-stained geometric designs in the concrete floors of the Ahwahnee Registration Lobby, Elevator Lobby, Dining Room, Solarium, Sweet Shop, and mezzanine. Born in 1898, Born studied architecture at the University of California at Berkeley, receiving Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees in 1922-23. In 1926, he married Esther Baum, a fellow architect who later became a noted architectural photographer.31 After graduating from Berkeley, Born worked as an architect in the San Francisco area until 1928, when he attended the École des Beaux Arts in

Fontainbleau, France. Born opened his own architecture practice in 1931 in New York, where he lived until 1937, when he returned to California and opened an architecture practice in San Francisco. In 1939, Born gained recognition for his artistic abilities when he painted several murals for the Golden Gate International Exposition, a World’s Fair that was held at San Francisco’s Treasure Island. During his architecture career, Born designed residential, commercial, and industrial structures in the San Francisco area, including a large low-income housing complex in North Beach in 1952. He also taught architecture courses at UC Berkeley from 1951 until 1974. During the 1970s, Born designed transit stations and created murals for the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system. His work for BART included the 1973 design and graphics for both the Glen Park and Balboa Park Stations, as well as a marble mural at the Glen Park Station. Born also illustrated architectural books, including the 1979 Plan of Saint Gall. His artistic works included murals, furniture design, and oil and watercolor painting.

Milton Roller, Lighting Designer (1879-1976)

San Francisco designer Milton Roller created the German Gothic style wrought iron light fixtures throughout the Ahwahnee Hotel, including floor lamps, wall sconces, and the massive chandeliers in the Dining Room, Great Lounge, and Solarium. Roller was employed by Phoenix Day Company, a well-known San Francisco lighting company. As a lighting designer, Roller created several unique fixtures in the San Francisco Bay area, including the 850-pound crystal chandeliers at the Sheraton Palace Hotel in San Francisco in 1909. While working for Phoenix Day, Roller developed an innovative new design for an electric lighting bracket, which he patented in 1922. In addition to his lighting designs, Roller also worked on other types of design projects, including creating a “fairyland” garden on the grounds of the Palo Alto home of Charles Whitney in 1917. Roller’s light fixtures are still in use in

the Ahwahnee today, and are prominent character-defining features of the hotel’s interior spaces.

Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Consulting Landscape Architect (1870-1957)

A prominent landscape architect of the early twentieth century, Olmsted, Jr. played an important role in developing design standards for Yosemite National Park and for the National Park Service as a whole. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. was born in New York in 1870 to famed landscape architect and conservationist Frederick Law Olmsted and his wife, Mary Cleveland Olmsted. The senior Olmsted had been an advocate for the creation of Yosemite National Park, and had served briefly as a commissioner to manage the Yosemite Grant in 1864. Olmsted, Jr. graduated from Harvard University in 1894, then became an apprentice to his father. As a principal of the Olmsted Brothers firm, Olmsted, Jr. contributed to thousands of landscape design projects throughout the United States, including the National Mall, Jefferson Memorial, White House Grounds, and Cornell University Grounds. Olmsted, Jr. was a founding member and president of the American Society of Landscape Architects. He also was instrumental in developing the concept of city planning in the United States, founding the American City Planning Institute in 1917. A dedicated conservationist, Olmsted Jr. devoted much of his life to contributing to the National Park system in the United States. He is credited with the well-known phrasing of the 1916 NPS Organic Act, “…to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

As a consulting landscape designer for the YP&C Co., Olmsted, Jr. contributed significantly to the design and planning of the Ahwahnee grounds, including consulting on the wildflower preserve, reflecting pond, and approach drive.

Ansel Adams, Photographer (1902-1984)

Renowned photographer Ansel Adams had a long association with the Ahwahnee from the hotel’s earliest days. Adams’s photos were used for the hotel’s early advertisements, and he was also employed by the YP&C Co. to produce a comprehensive photo documentation of the Ahwahnee before the Navy leased the property in 1943. In addition to his photographic contributions, Adams also served as director of the hotel’s annual Bracebridge Dinner from 1929 until 1971. A regular visitor to the Ahwahnee and a close friend of both the Tresidders and the Spencers, Adams was also a trained concert pianist, and could often be found playing the Steinway grand piano in the hotel’s Great Lounge.

Born in San Francisco in 1902, Ansel Adams was an only child, and received his education primarily through private tutors due to childhood struggles with illness and hyperactivity. His interest in photography began on a family vacation to Yosemite in 1916, when his father gave him his first camera—a Kodak Brownie box camera. Adams trained as a pianist for twelve years, initially intending to become a concert pianist. However, after spending summers in Yosemite throughout his late teen years and early twenties, Adams developed his photographic art and also cultivated a lifelong connection to the park. He published his first portfolio of photos, *Parmelian Prints of the High Sierras*, in 1927. In 1928, Adams married Virginia Best, the daughter of artist Harry Best, who operated Best’s Studio in Yosemite Valley. In 1935, when Harry Best passed away, Ansel and Virginia Adams inherited Best’s Studio and operated it until 1971.41 The studio, now known as the Ansel Adams Gallery, is still owned by the Adams family, and remains in operation in Yosemite Valley. During the 1940s, Adams became widely known for his photographs of national parks in the American West. Through his art, Adams also communicated his advocacy for social and environmental causes. An active member of the Sierra Club, Adams was a champion for the cause of wilderness and natural resource conservation. He also became an advocate for human rights during the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. In 1944, Adams published a book entitled *Born Free and Equal: The Story of Loyal Japanese-Americans*, which contained photographs of residents of the Manzanar War Relocation Center in California.42 During his lifetime, Adams published eight portfolios of original photographic prints, contributed writing and photographs to hundreds of articles, and was listed as author or artist on nearly fifty books.43 Adams passed away in 1984 in Monterey, California. Today, Adams’s photographs continue to be recognized as some of the most iconic images of the national parks, and he is widely acknowledged as one of the foremost American photographers of the twentieth century.

**Gunnar Widforss, Artist: Watercolor Paintings (1879-1934)**

Swedish-American artist Gunnar Mauritz Widforss was a painter who specialized in watercolor landscapes and was most well-known for his paintings of western national parks, particularly of the Grand Canyon and Yosemite. Widforss completed multiple sketches and paintings of the Ahwahnee’s exterior and interior spaces shortly after the hotel opened, and the hotel currently has eight Widforss paintings on display in the Registration Lobby corridor.

Widforss was born in 1879 in Stockholm, Sweden, and studied painting at the Technical School (now Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts, and Design), graduating in 1900. After an apprenticeship in St. Petersburg, Russia, Widforss traveled throughout Europe, North Africa, and the United States, often earning money by selling watercolor landscape paintings to tourists. Widforss traveled to California in 1921 and made his first visit to Yosemite in March of that year. For the next seven years, Widforss resided in Yosemite on a semi-regular basis. In 1923, he produced illustrations for Harold Symmes’s book, Songs of Yosemite. While in Yosemite, Widforss made the acquaintance of NPS Director Stephen Mather, who encouraged him to focus his work on America’s national parks. Widforss traveled throughout the western national parks and produced paintings of Zion, Bryce Canyon, Mesa Verde, Crater Lake, Carlsbad Caverns, Sequoia, Death Valley, and Yellowstone National Parks, before making his home at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon in the late 1920s. Widforss was known for taking long hikes into the canyon to locate scenes to paint, and for his preference for working plein aire, producing paintings outdoors rather than inside of a studio. In 1933, Widforss was part of a team of artists who created a series of murals depicting national parks at the Century of Progress International Exposition in Chicago. In 1934, at the age of fifty-four, Widforss suffered a heart attack and passed away at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon.44

Willem (Bill) Kat, Carpenter and Craftsman (1875-1972)

Bill Kat was a craftsman and carpenter who was involved in several construction and design projects at the Ahwahnee Hotel and Cottages, including the installation of wood floors at the cottages, cabinetry in the sixth floor apartment, the construction of the gate lodge, and the remodeling of the El Dorado Diggins Bar. Kat also carved the frieze of music notes around one of the sleeping porches in the cottages, and designed a wooden screen for the women’s restroom that was hand-carved with scenes from Yosemite.

Born in Holland in 1875, Kat immigrated to the United States in 1910, eventually settling in Oakland, California with his wife and five children.45 While working as a carpenter in Berkeley in the mid-1920s, Kat met Ted Spencer, the architect who would later design the Ahwahnee Cottages. When Ted and Jeannette Spencer were hired by the YP&C Co. in 1927, Ted invited Kat to work with him in Yosemite, and Kat subsequently spent approximately twenty years working as a carpenter in the

In addition to the craftsmanship he contributed to the Ahwahnee and other Yosemite buildings, Kat also left a legacy as an early pioneer of rock climbing and mountaineering in Yosemite. Kat Pinnacle, a rock formation along the north wall of Yosemite Valley, was named in honor of Bill Kat. After retiring in 1946, Kat remained active as a climber in Yosemite, completing his twentieth ascent of Mount Starr King when he was eighty-eight years old. Kat passed away in Oakland in 1972 at the age of ninety-seven.

3. **Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses:**

1925: The Yosemite Park & Curry Company (YP&C Co.) was formed through a merger between Yosemite’s two competing concessionaires, the Curry Camping Company and the Yosemite National Park Company. The merger, advocated by NPS director Stephen T. Mather and Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work, called for the construction of a new luxury hotel to attract higher-income visitors. Donald Tresidder was appointed as the first president of the YP&C Co. Tresidder was the husband of Mary Curry Tresidder, whose family had operated the Curry Camping Company in Yosemite since 1900.  

1927: The Ahwahnee Hotel was constructed; YP&C Co. retained ownership and management.

1928: Eight guest cottages, designed by Ted Spencer, were constructed on the Ahwahnee property. YP&C Co. retained ownership and management.

1943-1945: The Ahwahnee Hotel and Cottages were leased by the United States Navy during World War II for use as a hospital. Commissioned as the U.S. Naval Convalescent Hospital on June 25, 1943, the hospital was renamed as the U.S. Naval Special Hospital in 1945. The hospital was decommissioned on December 15, 1945 and returned to use as a hotel under ownership and management of the YP&C Co.

1946: After extensive rehabilitation, the Ahwahnee Hotel and Cottages reopened for visitor accommodations. The cottages opened for business in August; the main hotel building opened in December.


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1971: U.S. Natural Resources purchased the YP&C Co., acquiring ownership of the Ahwahnee Hotel and Cottages.

1973: The Music Corporation of America (MCA) purchased the YP&C Co., acquiring ownership of the Ahwahnee Hotel and Cottages.

1990: Matsushita Electrical Industrial Company, a Japanese corporation, purchased MCA, acquiring ownership of the Ahwahnee Hotel and Cottages. This provoked concerns about foreign ownership of National Park buildings and concessions.

1991: In an agreement sponsored by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, the National Park Foundation purchased the YP&C Co. and arranged to donate all buildings owned by the YP&C Co. to the National Park Service effective upon the expiration of MCA’s contract in 1993. This agreement would transfer ownership to the American people.

1993: Marking a significant change in concessions management and ownership of hospitality properties in Yosemite, the National Park Service acquired ownership of the Ahwahnee Hotel and all facilities previously owned by the YP&C Co. A concessions management contract was awarded to Delaware North Companies (DNC).

4. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:**

   **James L. McLaughlin Company, Contractor (1878-1950)**

   The James L. McLaughlin Company constructed the Ahwahnee Hotel in 1926-1927. The owner and principal of the San Francisco-based company was James L. McLaughlin. Born in Massachusetts, McLaughlin moved to San Francisco in the early 1900s, and worked for the firm of Frank Gilbreth’s Underwriters Engineering and Construction Company in 1906.49 By 1915, McLaughlin had established his own contracting company, and had constructed several apartment buildings, banks, and churches in the San Francisco Bay Area. When McLaughlin Co. was commissioned to construct the Ahwahnee Hotel in 1926, the company was one of the largest contracting companies in the Bay Area, and had constructed the Chico High School building, the Oxyacetylene generating plant for the Navy on Mare Island, and San Francisco’s original Dreamland Auditorium.

   **Phoenix Day Company, Supplier: Light Fixtures**

   The massive wrought iron chandeliers that hang in the Ahwahnee’s Great Lounge and Dining Room, as well as several wall and floor lamps throughout the hotel, were

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provided by Phoenix Day Company. Based in San Francisco, Phoenix Day is one of the oldest lighting companies in California. Founded in 1850 as the Thomas Day Company, the business started as a cutlery manufacturer before expanding into plumbing and gas fixtures. After the 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco, the company was instrumental in the rebuilding of the city, providing street lights throughout the city. A change in ownership in the early twentieth century resulted in the name change to Phoenix Day, and the company is still in business today as a lighting manufacturer in the San Francisco Bay area.  

Stedman Rubber Flooring Company, Supplier: Rubber Floor Tiles

Henry Temple Howard’s colorful geometric mosaic designs in the Registration Lobby floors were constructed from rubber tiles manufactured by the Stedman Rubber Flooring Company of South Braintree, Massachusetts. An innovative flooring material at the time, the rubber tiles were newly patented by James H. Stedman, the president of the Stedman Company, who held multiple patents for rubber flooring materials. Stedman Rubber Flooring was marketed nationwide as a durable and modern material that was available in a variety of different colors and patterns. In the 1920s and 30s, rubber flooring became popular as both a residential and commercial flooring material, and was particularly popular in hospitals and institutional buildings. When construction began on the Ahwahnee Hotel in 1926, both the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in New York City and the Tuller Hotel in Detroit had already installed Stedman Rubber Flooring in their public spaces. In 1936, the Armstrong Cork Company purchased the Stedman Rubber Flooring Company and its manufacturing plant in Massachusetts. Now known as Armstrong World Industries, the company is an international manufacturer of flooring and ceiling materials.

Dohrmann Hotel Supply Company, Supplier: Kitchen equipment, hospitality supplies

The tableware, equipment, and appliances in the Ahwahnee Hotel’s spacious kitchen were supplied by the Dohrmann Hotel Supply Company. Based out of San Francisco, the company was founded in 1868 by Frederick Dohrmann and Bernard Nathan, and was originally known as the Nathan-Dohrmann Company. The company sold fine china, crockery, and glassware, and by 1891, it was known as “the great china store of San Francisco.” In 1898, Frederick Dohrmann’s son, A.B.C. “Alphabet”

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Dohrmann, became a partner in the Nathan-Dohrmann Company, which operated a large retail store located at 130 Sutter Street in San Francisco. That same year, the Dohrmanns also acquired ownership of the Emporium, the largest department store in San Francisco. In the early 1920s, the Nathan-Dohrmann Company changed its name to the Dohrmann Hotel Supply Company, and A.B.C. Dohrmann was listed as president and chief executive officer of the company. Dohrmann’s involvement in Yosemite concessions began several years before the Ahwahnee was constructed, as he had been a principal investor in the Yosemite National Park Company in 1917, and later became president of the company. When the Yosemite Park & Curry Company was formed in 1925, A.B.C. Dohrmann was on the board of directors. Dohrmann was not only an influential member of the YP&C Co. board; he was also a regular fixture at the Ahwahnee Hotel and Cottages. One of the fourplex cottages was known in the 1920s and 30s as the “Dohrmann Cottage,” because A.B.C. Dohrmann stayed there for several months each year along with his wife, Edith, and their eight children. A.B.C. Dohrmann passed away in 1936; however, the Dohrmann Hotel Supply Company continued to prosper. By the 1950s, the company operated nineteen hotel supply branches in six different states. The company was purchased by Broadway-Hale Stores in 1956, and is now owned by Holiday Inn Hotels & Resorts.

Central Iron Works, Inc., Supplier: Structural steel I-beams

Central Iron Works of San Francisco supplied nearly 700 tons of steel to construct the Ahwahnee Hotel’s steel frame. A well-established manufacturer in the San Francisco Bay Area, Central Iron Works was founded circa 1900 by Andrew Devoto. By 1906, the company had opened a 30,000-square-foot manufacturing plant at 621 Florida Street. In 1914, The Architect and Engineer of California described Central Iron Works as “one of the most complete and modern fabricating plants on the coast.” Large steel-framing projects completed by Central Iron Works included the Bank of Italy Building in San Francisco (1908), the Gaiety Theater (1908), the St. Ignatius Church (1912), the Mission Dolores Basilica (1913), and the Tivoli Theater (1913).
5. **Original plans and construction:**

In July of 1925, the YP&C Co. selected architect Gilbert Stanley Underwood to construct a modern, fireproof, year-round luxury hotel in Yosemite Valley. Underwood submitted initial sketches for the new hotel in the fall of 1925, but plans and drawings were altered several times throughout the design and construction process. Underwood’s original plans were for a more massive, seven-story building; however, the size of the building was subsequently reduced at the request of the YP&C Co. board of directors.\(^{64}\) In January of 1926, Underwood’s plans provided for “a combination stone and slow burning, or mill type, construction;” however, by June, plans had been changed to make the building fireproof by utilizing steel-frame construction with granite piers and concrete walls that would be stained to resemble redwood.\(^{65}\)

The hotel was constructed by James L. McLaughlin Company of San Francisco. Since the YP&C Co. planned to have the building completed by December of 1926, the board of directors sought a contractor who would guarantee completion of the hotel by a set date for a fixed cost. McLaughlin’s contract from June of 1926 guaranteed completion of the hotel by December of that same year for a cost of $525,000.\(^ {66}\) However, disagreements between the architect, builder, and YP&C Co. delayed construction, as Underwood’s firm was unable to produce working drawings at the rate requested by the YP&C Co., and the building increased in size by twenty percent before completion. The Ahwahnee was ultimately completed in July of 1927, which was seven months later than originally planned. The final cost was $1.2 million—more than twice McLaughlin’s initial guaranteed amount.\(^ {67}\)

In addition to providing a year-round, fireproof lodging facility for wealthy visitors to Yosemite National Park, the Ahwahnee was also constructed in the tradition of national park “grand lodges,” and was designed to harmonize with the surrounding landscape. Underwood designed the Ahwahnee in a style that he termed “environmental,” utilizing rough-cut native granite masonry to emulate the texture of the surrounding granite cliffs.\(^ {68}\) In addition, the use of stained concrete as an exterior building material demonstrated the hotel’s embrace of modernity. The Ahwahnee was eventually categorized as “monumental rustic,” and although it shared some characteristics with other grand lodges, it was unique in its size, shape, setting, and use of materials. The interior of the hotel was designed by Phyllis Ackerman and

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\(^{64}\) See Part III for architect’s original drawings.

\(^{65}\) Gilbert Stanley Underwood, Letter to W.B. Lewis, January 22, 1926, Yosemite National Park Archives, Old Central Files, Series 10, Subseries 1, Box 74, Folder 69; Meeting Minutes, Yosemite Park & Curry Company, June 2, 1926, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 6, Box 2, Folder 534.


\(^{67}\) “Ahwahnee Cost Summary,” July 31, 1927, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 3, Box 1, Folder 238.

\(^{68}\) “Yosemite to Have New Hotel by Christmas: Six-Story Building Will Have Accommodations for 1000 Guests,” Unknown Newspaper, July 30, 1926, Yosemite National Park Archives, Historic Newspaper Collection, Box 7.
Arthur Upham Pope, who looked to the geometric designs of California Indian basketry as their inspiration for a design scheme that mixed an eclectic assortment of international artifacts with influences from the Arts & Crafts Movement. The exterior appearance of the hotel has remained relatively unchanged from its original appearance, and the original interior design scheme is still largely intact as well.

6. Alterations and additions:

The Ahwahnee Hotel has undergone very few exterior alterations since its initial construction, but has received several interior alterations. The most significant interior modifications have been the conversion of the sixth floor roof garden from a public entertaining space into an apartment for Don and Mary Tresidder, then later into individual hotel suites and a storage area (1928-32; 1971); the remodeling of the private dining room into the El Dorado Diggins Bar and subsequently into a guest suite (1934; 1987); the enclosure of the originally intended porte cochere space and subsequent remodeling into a cocktail lounge (1943; 1951); the repurposing of the Beauty Parlor into a guest room and the Barber Shop into office spaces (1959-65); and the remodeling of the Sweet Shop (1960). Additionally, some of the original hand-painted geometric stencil designs that adorned the massive ceiling beams in the Great Lounge were painted over in 1946, as were some of the stencil designs throughout the guest rooms and corridors. In 1946, artist Frann Spencer Reynolds painted a Mondrian-style wall mural above the Great Lounge fireplace; however, this mural was painted over in 1980.69 On the exterior, the original wood windows were replaced by aluminum windows (1979-80); and the ends of the concrete beams received fiberglass caps to prevent further weather damage (1979-80).

B. Historical Background and Context

Early History

For at least seven thousand years before European Americans first entered Yosemite Valley in the mid-nineteenth century, the area was visited and seasonally occupied by several groups of Native Americans, including the Miwoks, Yokuts, Maidus, Mono Paiutes, and Monaches.70 The Central and Southern Sierra Miwoks were the primary inhabitants of the Yosemite area during late prehistoric to early historic times. By the eighteenth century, a band of Southern Sierra Miwoks had settled permanently in Yosemite Valley, naming the valley Ahwahnee, which translates as “deep, grassy valley” or “gaping mouth.”71 These inhabitants called themselves the Ahwahneechees. Around 1800, an epidemic of disease struck the valley, in which the majority of the

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69 Correspondence between Tom Mulhern, Regional Chief of Cultural Resource Management; Jack Gyer, Yosemite Curator; Gordon Chappell, Regional Historian; Michaela DuCasse, Art assessor; and Knox Mellon, California State Historic Preservation Officer, November 15, 1979 – August 6, 1980, Yosemite National Park Archives, Resource Management Records, Series 2, Subseries 10-12, Box 25, Folder 515.

70 Francis Farquhar, History of the Sierra Nevada (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 11.

Ahwahneechee people were killed, and the remainder scattered to live with neighboring groups of people. After a period of several years during which the valley was unoccupied, a local Ahwahneechee leader named Tenaya moved back into the valley with a band of followers. Although Tenaya was a descendant of the Ahwahneechees who had lived in Yosemite Valley before the epidemic, the members of Tenaya’s band were comprised of a combination of Central and Southern Sierra Miwoks, Mono Paiutes, and possibly other groups. 72

In 1851, John Savage, a trader from the Mariposa area, formed a local militia called the Mariposa Battalion in order to retaliate against Native Americans who had allegedly attacked Savage’s trading posts along the Merced and Fresno Rivers. On March 27, 1851, the Mariposa Battalion entered Yosemite Valley, gaining credit as the first European Americans to “discover” the valley. However, accounts from miners and traders in the area show that other local residents had seen Yosemite Valley in the 1840s. 73 Lafayette Bunnell, a member of the Mariposa Battalion, published an account of the discovery in 1880, entitled Discovery of the Yosemite and the Indian War of 1851. Although reports of the grandeur of Yosemite Valley initially spread slowly, a tourist expedition led by magazine publisher James Mason Hutchings in 1855 circulated accounts that quickly spread to the Eastern United States, contributing to rapid growth of tourism to the area. 74 By 1864, an emerging national trend toward scenic preservation, spurred by concerns about the exploitation of natural resources in California and throughout the country, prompted a group of Californians to petition senator John Conness to present a bill to Congress to preserve the Yosemite Valley area along with the Mariposa Grove of Sequoias. On June 30, 1864, Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant Act, a pioneering act that provided for the first federal protection of “wild land” in the United States. 75 Yosemite Valley was managed by the State of California until 1890, when President Benjamin Harrison signed the bill to establish Yosemite National Park on October 1, 1890. 76

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, several privately-owned lodging facilities were operated in the park. Within Yosemite Valley, early accommodations included the Lower Hotel (later Black’s Hotel) (1857), Upper Hotel (later Hutchings’s Hotel) (1859), Leidig’s Hotel (1869), Sentinel Hotel (1876), Stoneman House (1886), Camp Curry (1899), Camp Yosemite (1901), Camp Ahwahnee (1908).

72 The account of disease, dispersion, and return to the valley was part of an oral history dictated by Tenaya to Lafayette Bunnell in an interview conducted in the mid-1850s; Lafayette Bunnell, Discovery of the Yosemite and the Indian War of 1851 (New York: F.H. Revell Co., 1880), Chapter 4, http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/discovery_of_the_yosemite/04.html; Greene, Yosemite, 3.
73 Greene, Yosemite, 17-23; Alfred Runte, Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 10.
74 Greene, Yosemite, 32-35.
75 Ibid., 51-54.
76 Ibid., 304.
Hotels constructed outside of Yosemite Valley included La Casa Nevada (1870), which stood at the base of Nevada Falls; Mountain View House (1869), located along the Glacier Point Road; Wawona Hotel (1878); and the Glacier Point Hotel (1917). Multiple small, informal campgrounds were also scattered throughout the park.

As visitation to the national parks increased in the early twentieth century, concessioners and railroad companies began constructing “great lodges” in several of the national parks, including Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Glacier National Parks; however, Yosemite did not yet have its own grand hotel. After the National Park Service was created in 1916, the first NPS Director, Stephen T. Mather, began efforts to arrange for the construction of a large hotel in Yosemite Valley. A native Californian, Mather was particularly fond of Yosemite, and planned to use the park as a model for development of other national parks. Mather sponsored the formation of the Desmond Park Service Company, which began construction on a large hotel in Yosemite Valley in 1917; however, the company exhausted its funds after digging the basement and creating a stone foundation for the building. Despite this setback, Mather continued to advocate for a luxury hotel in Yosemite Valley to attract wealthy and influential visitors to the park. Mather also promoted the idea that park concessions should be run by a monopoly, instead of competing concessionaires.

David and Jennie Curry, the owners of the Curry Camping Company that had operated in Yosemite since 1899, protested against the idea of a concessionaire monopoly in the park, and continued to compete against the Desmond Company. After Desmond declared bankruptcy in 1918, the Desmond Park Service Company became known as the Yosemite National Park Company. The two competing concessionaires sustained an intense rivalry in the following years; however, Mather was persistent in his belief that a monopoly would provide the only means to generate sufficient earnings to undertake the expense that would be necessary to construct a grand hotel in Yosemite Valley.

The Rise of Automobile Travel and Demand for a “Modern Hotel” in Yosemite Valley

In the early 1920s, Americans purchased automobiles in steadily increasing numbers, and automobile travel throughout the United States expanded rapidly. The growth in popularity of motor travel contributed to an increase in the need for roadside accommodations and also sparked widespread interest in touring America’s national parks by automobile. In 1924, Congress voted unanimously to approve a national park
roads bill, appropriating $7.5 million to construct and improve roads in national parks. $1.5 million of this sum was awarded to Yosemite National Park.  

Although existing stagecoach roads allowed access to Yosemite Valley via automobile in the warmer months, Yosemite superintendent W.B. Lewis lamented that “the pioneer motorist found [the roads] steep, narrow, and tortuous. Today they are entirely inadequate to serve as automobile roads.”  

As the NPS commenced efforts at repaving and improving roads within the park, the state of California also began constructing a new “All-Year Highway” from Merced to Yosemite Valley in 1924. While motor travel into Yosemite during the winter months had previously been difficult or impossible, the construction of the All-Year Highway meant that visitors could more easily travel into the park in winter, necessitating construction of lodging facilities that were sufficient for cold-weather accommodation. Even before construction on the highway began, Motor Land, the magazine of the California State Automobile Association, announced that “one of the first projects to be undertaken will probably be the erection of a large hotel, which, as occasion demands, may be extended by the construction around it of bungalow units.”

As the development of automobile touring altered visitation trends in Yosemite National Park, the management of concessions in the park was also undergoing a significant transformation. In 1924, NPS Director Mather worked with U.S. Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work to push Yosemite’s two competing concessioners, the Curry Camping Company and the Yosemite National Park Company, to merge into a single company. Negotiations for a merger began in late 1924, and by the spring of 1925, a new company was formed: the Yosemite Park and Curry Company (YP&C Co.). Included in the merger contract was a clause that required the new concessions company to construct a luxury hotel in Yosemite Valley. Donald Tresidder was selected as president of the new company, and planning began immediately for the construction of the new hotel.

The board of directors of the newly-formed YP&C Co. consisted of several influential California businessmen, as well as members who had long associations with Yosemite National Park. The original board of directors included the following individuals: Harry Chandler, publisher of the Los Angeles Times; A.B.C. (“Alphabet”) Dohrmann, former president of the Yosemite National Park Company and Chief Executive of the Dohrmann Hotel Supply Company; John S. Drum, co-founder and former president of the Yosemite Valley Railroad; Alfred Esberg, tobacco company executive; M.H. Sherman, Los Angeles land developer; Jennie (“Mother”) Curry, co-founder of the Curry Camping

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84 W.B. Lewis, “Seven Hundred Men to Work on Yosemite Roads,” Stockton Record, April 19, 1924, Yosemite National Park Archives, Historic Newspaper Collection, Box 2.
85 “Seven Hundred Men to Work on Yosemite Roads,” 1924.
86 “Yosemite All-Year Road is Making Progress,” Stockton Record, June 14, 1924, Yosemite National Park Archives, Historic Newspaper Collection, Box 2.
87 “New Plans for Yosemite,” Motor Land, 1924, Yosemite National Park Archives, Historic Newspaper Collection, Box 1.
88 Meeting Minutes, Executive Committee of Yosemite Park & Curry Company, May 30, 1925, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 6, Box 2, Folder 534.
89 Donald Tresidder, “Memorandum on the Ahwahnee Development,” November 12, 1927, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 7, Subseries 4.2, Box 1, Folder 187.
Company; Robert Williams, husband of Marjorie Curry Williams of the Curry Camping Company; Rufus L. Green, Stanford professor and cousin of Jennie Curry; Robert W. Cross; L.H. Harris; and P.M. Lansdale, president of the Bank of Burlingame.90

In addition to fulfilling the need for a year-round hostelry in Yosemite, the new hotel was also planned to be a modern structure designed to attract wealthy visitors, whose patronage Mather believed would benefit the NPS. Since several lodging facilities in Yosemite had been lost to structure fires, Mather and the YP&C Co. specified that the new hotel be not only modern, but fireproof as well. For years, Mather and park administrators had received complaints about Yosemite’s lack of “modern tourist hotels of the highest class” to accommodate the “large class that will not go [to the park] at all unless assured of the same hotel comforts to be found in a metropolitan city.”91 Having “long cherished the dream of a resort hotel” in his favorite national park, Mather finally began to see his vision taking shape in Yosemite Valley.92

Planning the Ahwahnee Hotel

The merger that formed the YP&C Co. was finalized in March of 1925, and by April, the site of the new hotel had already been selected. Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work had the honor of driving the stake to mark the location.93 For the new hotel, the NPS and YP&C Co. directors had chosen a site “amid the scattering pines and oaks” at Kenneyville, a stables operation near the eastern end of Yosemite Valley.94 Situated in a meadow on the sunny side of the valley below the Royal Arches, the site offered optimal views of Half Dome, Yosemite Falls, and Glacier Point, and was relatively isolated from the developed area of Yosemite Village. The Kenneyville site had been occupied since the 1860s, when James Lamon constructed a homestead and fruit orchard in the area. After Lamon’s death in 1876, the State of California took over ownership of the land, pursuant to the 1864 Yosemite Grant, and subsequently issued a 10-year lease to Aaron Harris to operate Royal Arch Farms.95 Harris operated a dairy farm at the site, raised hay in the Ahwahnee meadow, and eventually opened a campground and campers’ store, which he operated until 1887. The site was then leased to George Kenney and William Coffman, who opened Kenneyville Stables.96 By 1925, the Kenneyville site consisted of several barns, corrals, blacksmith and wagon shops, and other auxiliary structures, all of

90 Meeting Minutes, Executive Committee of Yosemite Park & Curry Company, May 30, 1925.
91 “National Parks in California: When They Are Equipped to Handle Every Class of Visitors They Will Be Profitable Assets,” 1921, Yosemite National Park Archives, Historic Newspaper Collection, Box 1.
92 Dorothy Ellis, Jeannette Dyer Spencer, and Phyllis Ackerman, The Ahwahnee: Yosemite National Park, California (Yosemite National Park: Yosemite Park & Curry Company, 1942), 3, Yosemite National Park Archives, Shirley Sargent Collection, Series 1, Box 9, Folder 137.
93 “Memorandum for Records of the Department,” Yosemite National Park, April 15, 1925, Yosemite National Park Archives, Old Central Files, Series 10, Subseries 1, Box 74, Folder 69.
94 Ibid.
96 Ibid., 145.
which were razed when the Ahwahnee Hotel was constructed.\textsuperscript{97} The decision to place the new, modern hotel on the site of the stables epitomized the ushering in of a new era in transportation. As the automobile became more and more widely accepted as the dominant method of touring, NPS and YP&C Co. officials saw the days of horse and stagecoach travel waning into obsolescence. In a 1926 press release regarding the razing of structures at the Kenneyville site, Yosemite Information Ranger James Lloyd remarked that “today, we find these old structures giving way for the new hotel. It is a spring cleaning that has long been needed in the valley, where the historic must give way to the modern needs, to accommodate the vast number of visitors that are annually visiting the charming vernal valley of towering cliffs and lofty waterfalls.”\textsuperscript{98}

To design the Ahwahnee, Tresidder and the YP&C Co. board of directors selected Gilbert Stanley Underwood, a Los Angeles architect who shared office space with NPS Chief Landscape Engineer Daniel Hull. Hull was a close friend of Underwood’s, and had recommended the young architect to the NPS in 1923 to design the post office building in the newly relocated Yosemite Village.\textsuperscript{99} In July of 1925, YP&C Co. board member Harry Chandler, publisher of the \textit{Los Angeles Times}, recommended Underwood to design the new hotel in Yosemite Valley.\textsuperscript{100} At the time he was hired to design the Ahwahnee, Underwood had recently completed grand lodges in Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks.\textsuperscript{101} Within a month of Chandler’s recommendation, Underwood had submitted a contract proposal to “supply complete architectural service including sketches, studies, working drawings, details, specifications, material lists, and architectural supervision” for the new hotel.\textsuperscript{102} Underwood’s compensation included a consulting fee of $2,500 per year plus three percent of the cost of work constructed and one percent of estimated costs of working drawings, as well as office costs and travel expenses.\textsuperscript{103}

Although the YP&C Co. specified that the new hotel be a fireproof building, Yosemite Superintendent W.B. Lewis expressed concern that “were we to insist upon fireproof construction, we would be limited practically to three types: namely, stone, concrete, or brick… no one of these three types would be considered entirely satisfactory from an architectural viewpoint. Furthermore, fireproof construction will greatly increase the cost of the hotel, which is a matter that already…is causing the company considerable

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{97}{Sargent, \textit{The Ahwahnee}, 7.}
\footnotetext{98}{James Lloyd, “Yosemite News Notes,” \textit{Stockton Record}, April 3, 1926, Yosemite National Park Archives, Shirley Sargent Collection, Series 1, Box 9, Folder 130.}
\footnotetext{100}{“Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee-Elect of the Yosemite Park & Curry Company,” Yosemite National Park, July 18, 1925, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 6, Box 2, Folder 534.}
\footnotetext{101}{Ibid., 32-42; Architectural Resources Group, Inc., \textit{The Ahwahnee: Historic Structures Report}, 2.}
\footnotetext{102}{Gilbert Stanley Underwood, Letter to Don Tresidder: Contract Proposal, July 21, 1925, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 10, Box 1, Folder 679.}
\footnotetext{103}{Ibid.}
\end{footnotes}
Since the NPS and YP&C Co. specified that the building embody both rustic style characteristics and fireproof construction, the architect had to work creatively within these constraints in order to design a building to fulfill the expectations of Mather and Tresidder. In January of 1926, Underwood’s plans provided for “a combination stone and slow burning, or mill type, construction;” however, by June, plans had been changed to make the building fireproof by utilizing steel-frame construction with concrete walls that would be stained to resemble redwood. While Underwood’s initial architectural plans were for a much more massive building, several revisions were made at the request of the YP&C Co. board, and the proposed hotel was reduced in size.

Constructing the Hotel

In the interest of completing the hotel by Christmas of 1926, the YP&C Co. sought a contractor that would guarantee completion by a set date for a flat fee. San Francisco builder, James L. McLaughlin, was recommended by board member John S. Drum, former president of the Yosemite Valley Railroad Company. McLaughlin came with “enthusiastic endorsements… that he was not only a very capable builder but was well known for the fact that he rarely exceeded his guaranteed figures, as well as for his honesty and reliability.” In June of 1926, the James L. McLaughlin Company submitted a proposal to complete the construction of the hotel by December 15th of that same year for a guaranteed cost of not more than $525,000. However, this estimate was based upon preliminary “general plans and specifications” provided by Underwood. Over the next year, numerous changes in plans for the hotel would provoke conflicts between the contractor, architect, and the YP&C Co., resulting in a building that ultimately would cost more than twice as much as the original estimate, and would take seven months longer than anticipated to complete.

On August 1, 1926, a ceremony was held to lay the cornerstone of the new, fireproof hotel and to celebrate the opening of the All-Year Highway into the park. California Governor Friend Richardson officiated the ceremony. To the assembled audience, Tresidder promised “the finest hotel service possible on the part of the traveling public,” assuring that the new hotel would epitomize “the last word in modern equipment.”

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104 W.B. Lewis, Letter to Stephen Mather, January 25, 1926, Yosemite National Park Archives, Old Central Files, Series 10, Subseries 1, Box 74, Folder 69.
105 Gilbert Stanley Underwood, Letter to W.B. Lewis, January 22, 1926, Yosemite National Park Archives, Old Central Files, Series 10, Subseries 1, Box 74, Folder 69; Meeting Minutes, Yosemite Park & Curry Company, June 2, 1926, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 6, Box 2, Folder 534.
106 Meeting Minutes, Executive Committee of the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, May 5, 1926, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 6, Box 2, Folder 534.
108 Meeting Minutes, Executive Committee of the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, May 5, 1926.
109 “New Structure to Fulfill Hopes of Ten Years; 100 Rooms Planned,” Unknown Newspaper, August 1, 1926, Yosemite National Park Archives, Historic Newspaper Collection, Box 7.
While the publicity surrounding the proposed hotel celebrated its “modernity,” the antiquity of the site was acknowledged in the name that was chosen for the hotel. Yosemite Superintendent Lewis notified Tresidder that he strongly advocated the name “Ahwahnee,” proclaiming, “it is euphonious and appropriate and an original Indian name that I think should be perpetuated and I know of no better way than by connecting it with the new hotel.”

Construction of the Ahwahnee Hotel began in August of 1926 and continued through the winter months. By April of 1927, the cost of constructing the hotel had increased substantially, and the building was not yet complete. Conflicts erupted between the YP&C Co., Underwood, and McLaughlin, resulting in the YP&C Co. board declaring that they “were thoroughly dissatisfied with the work he [Underwood] had done on the hotel, that they believed a great deal of the increased cost was due to the architect, that they felt he had not been loyal to them, that he had not given the proper amount of time to the job…” In response, Underwood countered that “the increased cost of the building was due to the owners’ failure to make decisions promptly and further to the fact that the Directors had divergent views as to what the building should be.” Tensions increased as McLaughlin and Underwood blamed each other for a twenty percent increase in the size of the building, and the YP&C Co. board criticized Underwood for lengthy delays in producing working drawings. Eight months into construction, McLaughlin notified Tresidder that “it is impossible to complete the construction of the Ahwahnee Hotel under the chaotic conditions created by owners and their agents… Already the changes in plans have made a structure so completely different in character, that it is no longer within any contract we have with you…” Despite arguments, threats of lawsuits, and a mysterious illness that kept McLaughlin away from construction for months, the Ahwahnee was eventually completed in July of 1927, at a cost of over $1.2 million—more than double the cost initially guaranteed by McLaughlin. Although the YP&C Co. had initially planned to retain Underwood as architect for the proposed Ahwahnee Cottages, Tresidder and the board of directors made the decision to dismiss Underwood after the completion of the main hotel building.

Architectural Style and Building Materials

Constructed of massive, rough-cut native granite boulders and steel-framed concrete stained to create the appearance of wood, the Ahwahnee was classified by Underwood as “environmental” in style due to its use of native materials and its appearance of

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111 E.P. Leavitt, Letter to Don Tresidder, September 11, 1926, Yosemite National Park Archives, Old Central Files, Series 10, Subseries 1, Box 74, Folder 69.
112 Unknown YP&C Co. Board Member, “Confidential memorandum of conversation with Mr. Gilbert Stanley Underwood,” April 11, 1927, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 3, Box 1, Folder 238.
113 Ibid.
114 James L. McLaughlin, Letter to Don Tresidder, March 18, 1927, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 6, Box 2, Folder 534.
115 “Ahwahnee Cost Summary,” July 31, 1927, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 3, Box 1, Folder 238.
“blending” with the surrounding granite cliffs. The unique Y-shape of the building was carefully designed and sited to maximize views of Yosemite Valley from the hotel’s large windows. The hotel is a monumental example of the Rustic style, a type that grew out of the American Arts and Crafts Movement. The Rustic style reflects the movement’s emphasis on outdoor living, handcrafted finishes, and deference to the surrounding natural landscape. A product of early twentieth-century efforts to protect natural spaces in the United States and the creation of the National Park Service in 1916, Rustic Style architecture includes a variety of styles and building types, but is generally defined by the desire to create buildings and structures that harmonize with the surrounding environment without detracting from or intruding upon natural landscapes. In “Rustic Architecture: The National Park Style,” Historical Architect Merrill Ann Wilson described the Rustic Style as follows:

[It was] a natural outgrowth of a new romanticism about nature, about our country's western frontiers...The conservation ethic slowly took hold in this atmosphere of romanticism.... Early pioneer and regional building techniques were revived because it was thought that a structure employing native materials blended best with the environment...\(^{116}\)

The building materials used to construct the Ahwahnee embodied both rustic imagery and modern construction techniques. The structural steel frame of the building was concealed by rough-cut, native granite masonry and board-formed concrete panels that were stained to resemble redwood. Underwood specified that stone masonry for the exterior of the hotel “shall be native granite ranging in size from four-man stone to two-man stone,” and that the building should be constructed “to achieve a rough and primitive appearance” even though modern stone-cutting equipment and techniques were utilized.\(^ {117}\) Further, Underwood directed that “all stone must be laid with the natural weathered surface exposed and no freshly cut surfaces will be allowed for exterior exposure.”\(^ {118}\) The practice of using modern techniques to create finishes that appeared to be constructed by hand was a common feature of the Arts and Crafts aesthetic. The flared granite piers on the exterior of the building emulated the shapes and proportions of the surrounding rock formations in Yosemite Valley. In addition to utilizing native granite, Underwood also directed that the jasper stone used for the Ahwahnee fireplaces be obtained from Jasper Station quarry, a site along the Yosemite Valley Railroad approximately fifty miles from the Ahwahnee site.\(^ {119}\)


\(^{117}\) Gilbert Stanley Underwood, “Preliminary Specifications for a Hotel to be Built in Yosemite National Park, California,” 1925, Section 10, p. 14, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 10, Box 1, Folder 679.

\(^{118}\) Ibid.

\(^{119}\) Ibid.
While Underwood utilized native materials to create a structure that harmonized with the surrounding environment, the requirement for the hotel to be fireproof meant that utilizing log construction was not feasible. Thus, Underwood designed the hotel’s exteriors with concrete beams that were designed to create the illusion that they were constructed with native logs. Exemplifying the hotel’s combination of both rustic and modern elements, the “imitation wood” exterior of board-formed concrete was stained with acid to resemble the color of redwood. Instead of reinforced concrete construction, the hotel was constructed with a steel frame enclosed in concrete. To complete the Ahwahnee’s structural steel frame, nearly 700 tons of steel I-beams were shipped via railroad and truck from San Francisco’s Central Iron Works. The only structural components constructed of wood were the massive log trusses and columns in the dining room, which were made from sugar pine logs harvested from the surrounding area. However, even the log columns hid steel reinforcements set behind them for structural support.

“Modern Science” and the Ahwahnee Hotel

In addition to the Ahwahnee’s unique status as a fireproof lodge in Yosemite, the hotel was also designed to embody modernity as well as luxury. The Ahwahnee contained the first elevator to be installed in Yosemite National Park. Further, Underwood consulted with acoustical engineer Dr. Vern Knudsen from the University of Southern California to create a soundproof environment in the hotel. Utilizing “noise-proof plaster” for the walls and padded floor coverings, Underwood sought to “avoid the usual hum of conversation and clash of dishes” associated with hotel operations. In addition, Underwood had the elevator equipment mounted on “sliding cork slabs imported from Spain” in order to reduce sound transmission. Describing the installation of the modern elevator and the extensive soundproofing efforts undertaken during construction, Underwood declared that “modern engineering science has dictated the construction of the Ahwahnee.”

Designing the Ahwahnee’s Interior Spaces

The interior design of the Ahwahnee was contracted to husband-and-wife team, Dr. Phyllis Ackerman and Arthur Upham Pope. Both Ackerman and Pope were well-known experts in Persian art who worked as brokers in buying and selling exotic artifacts and works of art to affluent collectors. Although they did not generally work as interior designers, Ackerman and Pope had a thorough knowledge of the tastes and preferences of

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122 “Modern Science Used in Building Yosemite Hotel,” *Vallejo News*, March 18, 1927, Yosemite National Park Archives, Historic Newspaper Collection, Box 7; See also “Can’t Keep Roar of Falls out of the Ahwahnee,” *Stockton Record*, March 19, 1927.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
the wealthy clientele who were the intended patrons of the Ahwahnee. Ackerman and Pope had recently organized the exhibition on Persian art for the Sesquicentennial Celebration and World’s Fair in Philadelphia in 1926. In December of that same year, the YP&C Co. hired Ackerman and Pope upon the recommendation of San Francisco patron of the arts, Albert Bender. Ackerman and Pope signed a contract to work as “consultants in the matter of finishing, furnishing, and decoration of the Ahwahnee Hotel” for a flat fee of $10,000.125 The designers worked with a furnishings budget of $135,000 and a lighting fixtures budget of $12,000.126 Assisting Ackerman and Pope as Associate Consultant was Dorothy Wood Simpson, an interior designer from San Francisco. Ackerman and Pope conceived of an eclectic design scheme for the Ahwahnee’s interiors, drawing on the designs of California Indian basketry for their inspiration, yet adding furnishings and décor from a variety of different regions of the world. In Ackerman’s design notes, she acknowledged the use of patterns from Pomo, Hupa, and Yuruk basketry. The design qualities that Ackerman sought to emphasize from the basketry included “combinations of lines and angles, simple two dimensional units such as triangles and parallelograms, built together in unexpected combinations.”127 However, designs that were particularly unique to the Yosemite Indians were not utilized. Although several Native American families lived in Yosemite Valley at the time the hotel was constructed, and many of the women created and sold baskets to tourists for income, Ackerman and Pope did not consult with the Native American women who lived in the Yosemite area. Rather, the interior designers primarily consulted academic works and museum collections in their research of Native American designs, particularly Alfred Kroeber’s *Handbook of the Indians of California*.

Pope and Ackerman selected an eclectic combination of fixtures and furnishings from around the world to accompany the California Indian basketry designs. These furnishings included *alpujarra* and *khilim* rugs from Spain and the Middle East, wrought iron light fixtures modeled upon German Gothic designs, sixteenth-century English oak tables, Colonial American Beacon chairs, Mexican terra cotta lamps, Japanese vases, French Gothic candle stands, and Flemish andirons. Textiles and tapestries from Iran, Italy, Greece, and Guatemala adorned the walls of the public spaces, along with mountain paintings from China and hand-woven fabrics from Kentucky and the Berkshires.128

The eclectic interior décor scheme also included elements of modern design and Art Deco style. Art Deco design elements in the hotel’s interior spaces included geometric shapes, bright colors, and symmetrical designs such as sunbursts. In addition, the hotel showcased designs borrowed from distant, ancient, and “exotic” cultures, which was a characteristic feature of Art Deco design. The use of stained glass, inlay, and detailed

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125 Don Tresidder, “Memorandum Relative to Decorating the Ahwahnee Hotel,” December 31, 1926, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 3, Box 1, Folder 238.
126 Phyllis Ackerman, “Preliminary Report on Furnishings and Decorating Expense,” Letter to YP&C Co. Board Member P.M. Lansdale, March 16, 1927, 1, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 3, Box 1, Folder 238.
127 Phyllis Ackerman, “Notes on the Ahwahnee Decorations,” 1927, 2, Yosemite Research Library. Ibid., 3-6.
ornamentation throughout the Ahwahnee’s interiors embodied the Art Deco aesthetic, particularly in the geometric, Native American-themed stained glass windows in the Great Lounge and the colorful rubber tile floor mosaics in the registration lobby. Further, the use of modern materials like concrete and rubber in the Ahwahnee’s interior design was a common feature of the Art Deco style, which celebrated modernity and the machine age. Ackerman provided the following explanation to elucidate the reasoning behind the hotel’s eclectic combinations of furnishings and finishes:

The furniture, chosen for comfort, solidity and good proportions, is not of any period or style but is borrowed from various sources. An attempt to recreate any specific preceding style would certainly be irrelevant in so distinctively modern a building, but to amalgamate many past periods is entirely modern, for we are the historically conscious heirs of all the ages.129

Ackerman and Pope designed the Ahwahnee’s interior spaces with attention to scale and detail, with the massive expanses of the high-ceilinged Great Lounge and Dining Room juxtaposed against small, detailed hand-painted stencils throughout the building. In the same way that the imposing, seven-story exterior of the Y-shaped building is dwarfed by the surrounding granite cliffs, the Ahwahnee Hotel’s interior is also uniquely defined by noticeable contrast between spacious public rooms and small, intricate design details.

While the overall design scheme of the Ahwahnee’s interior spaces was eclectic, Ackerman and Pope also designed some of the public rooms with unique design themes. The California Room (Winter Club Room) was designed to create a “rugged” ambiance that recalled California’s early history of mining and fur trapping. This room featured “animal heads and skins that are always a frontier luxury,” including a buffalo robe and a polar bear skin in front of the fireplace.130 Ackerman and Pope chose textiles for the California Room that were “reminiscent of the days of gold. Blue and red checks on the curtains and some of the rugs carry a flavor of old miners’ shirts…”131 After the Yosemite Winter Club formed in 1928, the California Room became the club’s meeting place, and the décor was later altered to include skiing and winter sports memorabilia.

The Writing Room (Mural Room) was designed with a French Gothic theme, and featured a massive mural painted by San Francisco artist Robert Boardman Howard. Howard’s mural is a toile piente, or painted tapestry, modeled upon a fifteenth-century French style called mille fleurs. The mural not only contributes to the eclectic décor scheme of the hotel, but also demonstrates the influence of the American Arts & Crafts Movement, which had revived the mille fleurs style. Ackerman described Howard’s mural as follows:

129 Phyllis Ackerman, “Notes on the Ahwahnee Decorations,” 1927, 4, Yosemite Research Library.
130 Ibid., 4; Dagmar Knudsen, “Indian Basketry Art in the Ahwahnee Hotel – Yosemite Valley,” The Architect and Engineer (November 1928), 55, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 236.
131 Ibid., 4.
...the so-called *mille fleurs*, with scores of little flowering plants fitted closely but informally together to make a flat pattern. The *mille fleurs* of Flanders and North France were composed of the familiar field flowers of the district and so, following the same principle, the Ahwahnee *toile piente* is decorated with the Yosemite flowers and plants. And just as the Franco-Flemish designers put the birds and little animals of their meadows and woods in among their flowers, so in this the most characteristic birds and animals of the Yosemite region are half concealed among the leaves. Indeed, the *toile piente* constitutes not only a delightful decoration, but also an illustrated nature guide.\(^{132}\)

Howard was not the only San Francisco Bay area artist that Ackerman and Pope consulted to contribute to the Ahwahnee’s interior design process. In addition, the designers commissioned Henry Temple Howard to design the rubber tile mosaic floors in the entrance lobby, Ernest Born to create etched designs in the concrete floors, Milton Roller to create wrought iron chandeliers, and Jeannette Dyer Spencer to design stained glass window panels and wall murals.

Drawing upon the geometric designs of California Indian basketry while utilizing both modern materials and the Art Deco style, San Francisco architect Henry Temple Howard designed the floor mosaics in the hotel’s entrance lobby using brightly colored rubber tiles. The mosaics were set into the lobby floor, which was created from polished concrete that was scored with geometric patterns and stained with acid to create a “modern” appearance.\(^{133}\) In her descriptions of the Ahwahnee’s décor scheme, Ackerman praised the mosaic floors as “an ancient architectural feature” created from “characteristically modern materials”—acid-etched concrete and rubber tiles.\(^{134}\) The rubber tiles were obtained from the Stedman Rubber Tile Company of South Braintree, Massachusetts, and were comprised of a newly patented rubber flooring material invented by James H. Stedman.\(^{135}\) The multi-colored, geometric tile designs were inlaid into the top layer of cement using brass strips to outline the designs. Because this was one of the first times that this type of inlay construction had been implemented, the Stedman Rubber Tile Company apparently refused to provide a guarantee for the job because of uncertainties about whether the rubber pieces would loosen with wear.\(^{136}\) However, eighty-seven years later, the tiles are still intact in their original configurations despite constant heavy foot traffic.

The concrete floors throughout the Registration Wing, Elevator Lobby, Dining Room, Under Lounge, Winter Club Room, Solarium, and North Mezzanine Lounge were also etched with geometric designs created by San Francisco artist Ernest Born. The floors

\(^{132}\) Phyllis Ackerman, “Notes on the Ahwahnee Decorations,” 1927, 5, Yosemite Research Library.

\(^{133}\) Don Tresidder, Letter to Mr. R.H. McDonnell, November 14, 1932, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 3, Box 1, Folder 238.

\(^{134}\) Ibid., 2.


\(^{136}\) Don Tresidder, Letter to Mr. R.H. McDonnell, November 14, 1932.
were colored with an acid stain, utilizing a process that Don Tresidder described as “entirely secret.”\textsuperscript{137} The YP&C Co. obtained “the necessary chemicals in powder form” from the Horn Products Company in Oakland, then mixed the stain onsite and applied the color with paintbrushes.\textsuperscript{138} While the geometric etching is still evident in the concrete floors today, the stain colors have largely faded away and are only faintly visible in some locations.

Also drawing upon antiquity while utilizing contemporary design ideas were the massive wrought iron chandeliers that hung throughout the hotel’s public spaces. Designed by Milton Roller of Phoenix Day Lighting Company in San Francisco, these chandeliers were created in the German Gothic style, exhibiting the rough, hand-crafted appearance that was characteristic of the Arts & Crafts Movement.

While designing the interior of the massive Great Lounge, a conflict erupted between Ackerman and Underwood regarding the large picture windows that surround the perimeter of the room. After deeming Underwood’s original window designs as “execrable,” Ackerman and Pope submitted sketches to redesign the windows. However, Underwood apparently disregarded these drawings, choosing instead to continue with the original designs. After discovering that windows based on the original designs had already been ordered and shipped to the Ahwahnee site, Ackerman sought to resolve the situation by modifying the original designs, since replacement of the windows at that point would have added a cost of $10,000 as well as a month-long delay. Aggravated by the situation regarding the Great Lounge windows, Ackerman wrote to YP&C Co. board member P.M. Lansdale, accusing Underwood of “seriously negligent architectural administration.”\textsuperscript{139} Ackerman declared that “the quality of the rooms is irreparably damaged. Fenestration is of course of signal importance in any architectural effect, both exterior and interior, and this is especially true in this building which is made of windows. The utmost ingenuity has been expended to put something in those frames that will take the curse off them…”\textsuperscript{140}

The solution that Ackerman found to “take the curse off” of the Great Lounge windows was to commission her former UC Berkeley classmate and sorority sister, Jeannette Dyer Spencer, to design ten stained glass panels for the upper sections of each of the Great Lounge windows. Spencer held a Master’s Degree in Architecture, and she had recently received a diploma in stained glass design from the École du Louvre in Paris.\textsuperscript{141} Following Ackerman’s design scheme for the hotel, Spencer’s ten stained glass panels for the Ahwahnee were designed with Native American motifs that were derived from the geometric designs of California Indian baskets. In her 1927 interior design notes, Phyllis Ackerman described the stained glass windows as follows:

\textsuperscript{137} Don Tresidder, Letter to Mr. R.H. McDonnell, November 14, 1932.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Phyllis Ackerman, Letter to YP&C Co. Board Member P.M. Lansdale, “Preliminary Report on Furnishings and Decorating Expense,” March 16, 1927, 2.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} Jeannette Dyer Spencer, Letter to Beth Resseger, May 27, 1975.
At the top of each of the ten high windows is a panel of stained glass, every one different, the series forming a rhythmical frieze that bands the room. They are all composed of Indian patterns, but in putting these designs into glass they have been fragmented into their elements in the manner developed by the great glass makers of the thirteenth century in France, the high period of the art. Stained glass design has for the last two hundred years been arid and artificial. Here is an influence that may contribute to a renewal of its vitality.\(^{142}\)

Spencer subsequently painted a basket mural above the fireplace in the elevator lobby and also created intricate geometric stencil designs for the massive ceiling beams in the Great Lounge. While the ceiling beams have been painted over, the stained glass panels and basket mural still exist in their original locations. Ackerman’s commissioning of Spencer to design the stained glass windows not only contributed unique designs to the Ahwahnee’s interiors, but also facilitated the introduction of Jeannette’s husband, architect Eldridge “Ted” Spencer, to Don Tresidder and the YP&C Co. Board of Directors. By the end of 1927, Ted Spencer had been hired as company architect for the YP&C Co., and the Spencers subsequently spent nearly fifty years working in Yosemite. Ted Spencer designed the Ahwahnee Cottages, the Badger Pass Ski Lodge, the Yosemite Lodge, and the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center and Auditorium, as well as several other structures during his career with the YP&C Co.

**Grand Opening**

Instead of opening in December 1926 as planned, the Ahwahnee Hotel opened on July 14, 1927 at a ceremony presided over by NPS Director Mather.\(^{143}\) Despite lasting tensions between architect, builder, and the YP&C Co. over the cost and duration of the hotel’s construction, the Ahwahnee’s grand opening was a celebrated event. Yosemite Superintendent Washington Lewis praised the hotel as “a lovely thing, appropriate, and harmonious, and an institution in which Yosemite may take the fullest pride for all time to come. Without doubt it is one of the finest hotels in the country.”\(^{144}\) Newspaper articles announcing the grand opening declared that the reservation list “reads like several pages of ‘Who’s Who in America.’”\(^{145}\) Opening night guests included several California executives and congressmen, as well as the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Hubert Work. Although the U.S. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover declined his invitation to the grand opening, he visited the Ahwahnee two weeks later on July 26, 1927, and he returned to the hotel several times before and after his presidency. Newspaper publicity

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\(^{142}\) Phyllis Ackerman, “Notes on the Ahwahnee Decorations,” 1927, 3.


\(^{144}\) W.B. Lewis, “Memorandum for the Record,” July 18, 1927.

\(^{145}\) “Tresidder Picks Staff for New Hotel Ahwahnee,” *Stockton Record*, July 9, 1927, Yosemite National Park Archives, Historic Newspaper Collection, Box 7.
not only extolled the prestigious guest list at the Ahwahnee’s grand opening, but also praised the hotel for blending with its surrounding environment. In an article entitled “Hotel Ahwahnee Finest in Any National Park,” the Stockton Record pronounced that “a monumental structure usually means a building that stands out apart from its setting, but with the Ahwahnee the order has been reversed, for the hotel seems almost an integral part of its surroundings against the gray granite walls of the cliff.”\textsuperscript{146} Acknowledging Mather’s objective of catering to elite guests at the Ahwahnee, YP&C Co. hospitality manager Roy Emery predicted that “there is every indication that the Ahwahnee will become the social gathering place for the discriminating, with a hotel service planned to win the approval of our most exacting guests.”\textsuperscript{147}

A last-minute alteration that completed the building only days before the hotel’s grand opening was the addition of a porte cochere and covered wooden walkway at the rear of the building. The original porte cochere, located at the east end of the Registration Wing of the building, was never used for the purpose for which it was initially designed. Only a few weeks before the opening, hotel employees noticed that the noise and emissions from vehicles created a disturbance for the guest rooms directly above the porte cochere. Therefore, it was decided that the original porte cochere would be abandoned, and a new porte cochere and attached covered walkway were hastily constructed at the rear of the east wing.\textsuperscript{148} This not only altered the main point of entry to the hotel, but also provided guests with a different initial view of the building’s interior. Regarding the rushed construction of this addition, manager Hil Oehlmann remarked that “the new construction was so hurriedly executed that it is only a slight exaggeration to state that the carpenters were only a few feet ahead of the painters, and the painters almost collided with the first arriving guests.”\textsuperscript{149} Despite the hastiness with which they were constructed, the covered wooden walkway and rear porte cochere remain the main point of entry for the hotel today. The original intended porte cochere was later enclosed with walls during the 1940s, and was subsequently remodeled into a cocktail lounge.

**Early Years**

The Ahwahnee opened with rates starting at $10-$12 per day. In comparison, rates for other accommodations in Yosemite Valley at the time started at $2.25 per day at facilities like Curry Village and the Yosemite Lodge.\textsuperscript{150} However, while the Ahwahnee operated on the “American Plan,” which meant that meals were included in the lodging rate, Curry Village and Yosemite Lodge rates were on the “European Plan,” meaning that meals were not included.\textsuperscript{151} Reservation offices for the YP&C Co. were located in six different

\textsuperscript{146} “Hotel Ahwahnee Finest in Any National Park,” Stockton Record, June 25, 1927, Yosemite National Park Archives, Historic Newspaper Collection, Box 7.

\textsuperscript{147} “Tresidder Picks Staff for New Hotel Ahwahnee,” Stockton Record, July 9, 1927.


\textsuperscript{149} Sargent, *The Ahwahnee*, 16.

\textsuperscript{150} “Like Yosemite, The Ahwahnee is an Experience,” Advertisement, Winter 1928, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 7, Subseries 4.2, Box 1, Folder 187.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
California cities: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland, Fresno, and Merced. In developing advertising and marketing strategies for the Ahwahnee, Tresidder stressed the importance of maintaining sufficient income during the winter months, when visitation to the park decreased. Tresidder intended to cater to the “California resort business”—clients who stayed in the park for weeks or months at a time—in order to generate profits during the winter months. Tresidder projected that the longer-term resort clientele would be responsible for seventy-five percent of the Ahwahnee Hotel’s business, while short-term “sightseeing travelers” would comprise only twenty-five percent. In order to attract longer-term guests, the YP&C Co. commissioned Ted Spencer to design eight cottages to be constructed in 1928 in the forested area immediately southeast of the hotel.

The YP&C Co. consulted with the H.K. McCann Advertising Company, who the YP&C Co. had worked with since 1920, to develop a publicity campaign for the Ahwahnee. In their initial consultation, the H.K. McCann Company presented “the major problem” of the YP&C Co. as the importance of attracting a “higher type of patronage” comprised of affluent park visitors. However, the company feared that this segment of the market would be deterred by the “present impression of a crowded park.” The advertising plan for the Ahwahnee also acknowledged that stiff competition for this clientele existed elsewhere, including “steamship lines, European tours, Hawaii with its new hotels and steamers – as well as the growing competition of other California resorts, in most of which guests can play golf.” Stressing the importance of advertising Yosemite as a place of year-round recreation, the H.K. McCann Company proposed a $43,378 annual advertising plan for the YP&C Co. in 1927. Of this total, $6,400 would be devoted exclusively to advertising the Ahwahnee’s grand opening. Advertising was focused primarily in newspapers within California cities, as well as in regional and national travel magazines like Sunset and National Motorist.

Early advertisements for the Ahwahnee contained artistic renderings of the hotel along with illustrations of outdoor recreation activities such as fly fishing, skiing, and dog sledding. Advertising text focused on descriptions of the hotel’s architecture, setting, and décor, as well as explanations of recreational activities available. For example, text from a 1930 advertisement reads:

The atmosphere of The Ahwahnee is not that of a hotel. Its feeling is that of a spacious home whose owner has planned it boldly but with faultless

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152 “The Ahwahnee – In the Yosemite National Park,” Ahwahnee Advertisement, 1927, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 7, Subseries 4.2, Box 1, Folder 187.
154 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid, Appendices A-C.
instinct. A spirit of complete informality and friendliness prevails. Through every window is a Yosemite picture, and the huge end-window of the stone-pillared dining hall frames Yosemite Falls. The beauty of The Ahwahnee interior, at once vigorous and restful, combines the artistry of twenty-two countries and a span of a thousand years. For all that, The Ahwahnee is pure Yosemite.159

Ted Spencer, who was hired as architect for the YP&C Co. in 1928, also conceived of the Ahwahnee Hotel as catering to the clientele of the California resort business. In a 1930 report on proposed future development for the Ahwahnee site, Ted Spencer noted that the Ahwahnee’s principal competition for the “resort or vacationist class” were the Hotel Del Monte in Monterey, the Tahoe Tavern in Tahoe City, the Santa Barbara Biltmore, and resorts at Palm Springs.160 Echoing H.K. McCann Company’s recommendation that a golf course would enhance the Ahwahnee’s attractiveness for elite guests, Spencer declared that “the greatest single need at the Ahwahnee, to create new business and increase the length of stay, is a golf course.”161 Plans for a golf course were approved by NPS Landscape Architect Thomas Vint in April of 1930, and the nine-hole, 679-yard course was constructed during the summer of that year.162 However, additional development plans presented by Spencer, including the construction of a garage, an outdoor theatre, a casino, and forty additional guest rooms in both the hotel and cottage areas, were never carried out by the YP&C Co.163

In addition to installing the golf course at the Ahwahnee, the YP&C Co. also conducted extensive landscape design efforts on the hotel grounds in order to appeal to the Ahwahnee’s elite clientele. Although the hotel was constructed during an era when NPS and YP&C Co. officials debated over the value of maintaining unaltered natural spaces in Yosemite, ultimately the economic incentives of developing the Ahwahnee grounds for recreation were embraced by the YP&C Co. This was evident not only in the construction of the golf course, but also in the company’s decision to install bridle paths for horseback riding (1928), tennis courts (1929), an outdoor dancing pavilion (1940), and an outdoor swimming pool (1964).164

159 “The Ahwahnee – In Yosemite,” Advertisement, c. 1930 Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 7, Subseries 4.2, Box 1, Folder 187.


161 Ibid, 2.


164 John Wosky, Letter to Thomas Vint, March 5, 1928, Yosemite National Park Archives, Old Central Files Collection, Series 7, Subseries 2, Box 28, Folder 58; Hil Oehlmann, Letter to L.C. Merriam, May 6, 1940, Yosemite National Park Archives, Old Central Files Collection, Series 10, Subseries 1, Box 73, Folder 67.
While creating opportunities for recreation on the hotel grounds was a prime consideration in the YP&C Co.’s objective to operate the Ahwahnee as a resort hotel, landscaping projects also involved efforts to foster appreciation of Yosemite’s natural environment. An example of this was the creation of a twenty-five-acre wildflower garden containing more than one million native Yosemite flowers. In 1928, the YP&C Co. contracted with Carl Purdy, a “nationally known wildflower expert” from Ukiah, California, to create a garden on the Ahwahnee grounds that would be comprised exclusively of native Yosemite plants. Purdy transplanted wildflowers from all elevations of Yosemite National Park to create the wildflower garden, which the YP&C Co. hailed as “the world’s greatest wild flower garden ever planted by man.” The planting of the wildflower garden at the Ahwahnee exemplified the ideals of the Picturesque Movement in American landscape design. Although the movement was first conceived in the eighteenth century, the ideals of the Picturesque Movement, as applied to the national parks in the 1920s and 1930s, involved “the interpretation of geographic features into landscape scenes…imply[ing] a broad cultural basis and aesthetic tradition for understanding places as pictures, and seeing land as landscape.” Landscaping was also intended to encourage “preservation through picturesque interpretation” by fostering an ethic within park visitors to preserve “natural” landscapes by interpreting them via designed spaces. The ideals and objectives of the Picturesque Movement were evident in landscape design throughout Yosemite Valley, where designed spaces were created to convey the idea that the natural world could be not only sublime—as exemplified in Yosemite’s towering cliffs—but also benevolent and gentle.

The Picturesque ideal of fostering preservation through designed landscapes was also exemplified in the 1934 installation of a reflecting pond that was a replica of a high alpine lake. Located adjacent to the hotel’s porte cochere, the pond was designed by Ted Spencer with input from YP&C Co. consulting landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. The reflecting pond was created to resemble a “High Sierra glacial lake,” with plants transported from Yosemite’s high elevations to surround the pond. In 1934, the reflecting pond was featured in an article in *House and Garden* magazine, where the author detailed Spencer’s design process:

Eldridge T. Spencer, San Francisco architect who had camped much in the Yosemite back country, planned this charming pool to mirror Yosemite Falls and the three thousand foot cliffs of Yosemite Valley and to simulate, in every minute detail, a glacial lake. An entire summer was

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165 “Million Wild Flowers Will Grace Yosemite,” *Vallejo Times Herald*, September 12, 1928, Yosemite National Park Archives, Historic Newspaper Collection, Box 8; Meeting Minutes, Executive Committee of Yosemite Park & Curry Company, May 26, 1928, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 6, Box 2, Folder 534.
166 “1,000,000 Wild Flowers to be Set Out in 25-Acre Garden at Yosemite Park,” *San Diego Union*, September 9, 1928, Yosemite National Park Archives, Historic Newspaper Collection, Box 8.
168 Ibid., 25-27.
spent wandering through the high meadows and climbing remote mountains in the back country, where load after load of rare plants and shrubs were gathered, with the sanction and co-operation of the National Park Service. Every blade of grass, every bit of moss, even the old log that lies half-submerged at the margin of the pool, came from Alpine levels, and all are planted as nearly as possible in conditions similar to those in which they were found.  

The Bracebridge Dinner

In December of 1927, Don and Mary Tresidder initiated a holiday celebration at the Ahwahnee Hotel that became a popular yearly tradition that is still practiced at the Ahwahnee today. The Bracebridge Dinner is a theatrical holiday feast held each December in the hotel’s immense dining room. The dinner is based upon an essay from Washington Irving’s 1819 book, The Sketch Book, which presents the tale of a Christmas feast at Bracebridge Hall in Yorkshire, England. Tresidder selected the famed San Francisco pageant director, Garnet Holme, to adapt Irving’s tale into a theatrical production, and placed Jeannette Dyer Spencer in charge of decoration and costumes. Spencer also designed the backdrops, which were replicas of stained glass windows created using lacquer paint on parchment. The backdrops included a large “Bracebridge Window” and four smaller roundels called “Yuletide Windows,” each of which depicted a unique holiday scene. The pageant and “baronial feast” were created both to generate income for the hotel, and also to enhance the image of the Ahwahnee Hotel as a “country home” by associating its setting with that of an English country manor.

The original Bracebridge Dinner featured Don Tresidder in the role Squire Bracebridge, a character he played at every Bracebridge celebration until the end of his life. Joining Tresidder in the cast of the production were Mary Curry Tresidder as Lady Bracebridge and the young photographer and musician, Ansel Adams, as the Lord of Misrule. After Garnet Holme passed away in 1929, Ansel Adams took over as director of the ceremony, composed new text for the production, and added several musical numbers. Adams also played the role of the Major Domo. At his directorial debut in 1929, Adams greeted Bracebridge Dinner guests with the following welcome:

Lord and Lady, Youth and Maid
Give reins to mirth and let not fade
The tumult of unceasing joy;
Nourish laughter. Gloom destroy.

171 Ibid., 31.
174 “The Ahwahnee: Bracebridge Dinner, Christmas 1929,” Dinner program, December 1929, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 8, Subseries 3, Box 1, Folder 791.
Conceived as a lighthearted celebration, the three-hour feast featured several courses, including a “mighty boar’s head,” baron of beef, “majestic peacock pie,” flaming wassail, and plum pudding.\textsuperscript{175} The original Bracebridge Dinner procession was sung by an all-male chorus from San Francisco’s Bohemian Club.\textsuperscript{176}

In 1938, the Bracebridge Dinner was featured on the cover of \textit{Life} Magazine, and the popularity of the pageant continued to grow throughout the ensuing decades. In 1946, Adams hired Bay Area conductor Eugene Fulton as Musical Director, and in 1956, a second performance of the Bracebridge Dinner was added on Christmas Day to meet increasing demand. After serving as director of the Bracebridge Dinner for over forty years, Ansel Adams retired in 1973. Upon Adams’s retirement, Fulton took over production of the pageant. In 1977, due to the high demand for admission to the Bracebridge Dinner, the National Park Service instituted an annual lottery for tickets. Today, the Ahwahnee Hotel holds eight Bracebridge Dinner performances each year between December 13\textsuperscript{th} and 25\textsuperscript{th}. The pageant is directed by Andrea Fulton, the daughter of Eugene Fulton, who began her involvement with the Bracebridge dinner as a child in 1950.\textsuperscript{177}

\textbf{Early Alterations to the Ahwahnee’s Interiors}

One of the earliest interior alterations to the hotel was the remodeling of the sixth floor into an apartment for YP&C Co. president, Don Tresidder, and his wife, Mary Curry Tresidder. Underwood’s original plans show the sixth floor as an enclosed “roof garden” that was intended to be a public space for entertaining and dancing.\textsuperscript{178} The space had an open floor plan, and was surrounded by several sets of operable windows. A large covered balcony extended from the southeast corner of the roof garden; however, the balcony was converted into a sun porch when the space was remodeled into an apartment.\textsuperscript{179} The only extant photo of the original sixth floor space is a picture of a birthday dinner held for Stephen Mather on the balcony circa 1928.\textsuperscript{180} No other photos exist to document the original roof garden space, as it was remodeled into the Tresidder apartment very shortly after the hotel opened.\textsuperscript{181} The Tresidders resided in the sixth floor apartment for decades (with the exception of the period between 1943-1945, when the Navy leased the Ahwahnee), and the space was remodeled into guest suites after Mary Curry Tresidder’s death in 1970.

\textsuperscript{175} “The Ahwahnee: Bracebridge Dinner, Christmas 1929,” Dinner program, December 1929.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{180} A copy of the balcony photo is included in Part III: Early Views.
\textsuperscript{181} Architectural Resources Group, “The Ahwahnee: Historic Structures Report,” I-100 – I-101; Sargent, \textit{The Ahwahnee}, 22-23; Although existing primary documentation does not specify a date when this transformation occurred, the remodeling of the sixth floor into an apartment occurred between 1928 and 1932.
Another early interior alteration was the remodeling of the mezzanine-level private dining room into a cocktail bar. When Prohibition ended in 1933, the YP&C Co. responded to guests’ demand for alcohol and obtained a liquor license. Tresidder sought to “make alcoholic beverages available for our guests who wish it, in such a manner as it will be as unobjectionable as possible for those who do not wish it or object to its use.”

In 1934, in an effort to serve alcohol to guests who wished to consume it without being conspicuous or offensive to other guests at the Ahwahnee, the YP&C Co. opened a cocktail bar on the mezzanine of the hotel in the location of the former private dining room. Called the “El Dorado Diggins,” the bar was designed as a replica of a California gold rush-era mining town, complete with false storefronts and antique furnishings. Ted and Jeannette Spencer worked together to design the space, which included false fronts of a Wells Fargo Bank, Chinese “Joss House,” Sullivan & Cashman’s Emporium, sheriff’s office, and blacksmith shop constructed from false brick and weathered wood. Within these facades, Jeannette Dyer Spencer arranged “little lighted windows with displays of relics from the Mother Lode,” which included mining artifacts that were personally gathered by Spencer from the local area on a series of trips along Highway 49 and throughout the Sierra Nevada.

YP&C Co. carpenter Bill Kat carved antique wagon seats into benches and fashioned gold mining rocker boxes into tables for guests at the “Cosmopolitan Bar.” However, although the Diggins was popular among hotel guests, temperance and anti-alcohol attitudes were still very common after the end of Prohibition, and even Kat declined to continue working on the Diggins after he realized that alcohol would be served there. In 1935, the Superintendent of Yosemite National Park, C.G. Thomson, visited the Ahwahnee, and upon discovering the new bar celebrating the “convivial atmosphere of the ’49 period,” remarked of the space as follows:

> It strikes me as a false note. In my opinion, it is a decided let-down in the Ahwahnee atmosphere, and out of place in a national park. It has been my impression that we were to serve liquor merely as a simple service to the public, but not to accentuate it in any way. In this case the apparent idea is to compete with the rash of “cocktail lounges” that has broken out in many hotels in California, most of which are in poor taste, and which are being laughed at by thoughtful people.

Despite the objections regarding alcohol consumption in the El Dorado Diggins, the bar remained popular for several decades. The Diggins remained in operation until 1987, when it was converted into a guest room suite.

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184 Sargent, *The Ahwahnee*, 34.
185 C.G. Thomson, “Memorandum for the Files,” Yosemite National Park, July 13, 1935, Yosemite National Park Archives, Old Central Files Collection, Series 10, Subseries 1, Box 74, Folder 72.
World War II and the U.S. Naval Special Hospital

Since its initial construction, the Ahwahnee has been used exclusively as a hotel, with the exception of the period between June 1943 and December 1945. During this two-and-a-half-year period, the hotel was commissioned by the United States Navy for use as a hospital during World War II. The idea of using the hotel as a “rest and convalescent camp” for returning Navy veterans was first proposed in November of 1942. By April of 1943, a lease was negotiated, and the Navy took possession of the Ahwahnee Hotel on June 7, 1943. Initially called the U.S. Naval Convalescent Hospital, the facility housed neuropsychiatric patients. However, administrators soon found that the isolation, lack of diversions, and the enclosed setting of Yosemite Valley—with its high vertical cliff faces that approximated the appearance of fortified walls—contributed to several cases of claustrophobia and to detrimental psychological and mental effects for residents. Thus, the hospital changed its operations to a general medical and surgical facility, and the facility was renamed the U.S. Naval Special Hospital in 1945.

During the time that the Navy leased the hotel, several modifications were made to the Ahwahnee property. These alterations included the repurposing and remodeling of interior spaces and the installation of several temporary structures on the property. A recreation hall and large washroom were constructed near the hotel in 1943, and an enclosed passageway connected these new spaces directly to the hotel Solarium. A building for medical storage and galley quarters was erected in the former parking area, and a fence and guard house were constructed at the entrance to the hotel. The Navy subsequently installed a garage, service store, bowling alley, pool hall, physical training building, and rehabilitation center on the 37-acre Ahwahnee grounds. Several of these structures were created by combining together multiple Army temporary buildings brought in from outside the park.

The interior spaces of the hotel were also repurposed for hospital use. The massive Great Lounge was transformed into a ward with more than one hundred beds lining the space. The Tudor Lounge and the second, third, and fourth floors of the hotel were utilized as operating rooms, wards, x-ray rooms, and laboratories. Administrative offices were located on the mezzanine, the gift shop was converted into a personnel office, and the dining room office became a post office. In addition, the space at the northeast end of the Registration Wing that had originally been intended to be the porte cochere was enclosed to be used as a baggage room. Nurses’ quarters occupied the fifth floor, while Don and Mary Tresidder’s sixth floor apartment was converted into commanding officers’ quarters. The Navy also converted the El Dorado Diggins Bar on the mezzanine into a

186 History of the United States Naval Special Hospital, Yosemite National Park, California (Yosemite: Yosemite Park and Curry Company, 1946), 7.
187 Ibid., 8-10, 16.
188 Ibid., 28-39, 57.
189 Ibid., 8, 12.
190 Ibid.
191 Ibid., 10.
Catholic chapel, and several weddings were held in the chapel during the hotel’s use as a hospital. The Writing Room on the ground floor was also designated as a Protestant chapel. 192 The transformation of the hotel and grounds was significant, with up to 850 patients housed at a time, in comparison with the 250-guest maximum occupancy of the hotel. 193

On December 15, 1945, the Navy decommissioned the U.S. Naval Special Hospital, and the Ahwahnee Hotel and Cottages were returned to the YP&C Co. to prepare for guest accommodation. In total, 6,752 patients were treated at the hospital between June of 1943 and December of 1945. 194

Changes After World War II

After the YP&C Co. regained management of the Ahwahnee in December of 1945, the hotel underwent extensive rehabilitation for a full year before it would again open its doors for visitor accommodations. During this time, the YP&C Co. engaged in a lawsuit against the Navy for rental and restoration costs. Judgment in the lawsuit would be delivered in March of 1948, with the YP&C Co. awarded payment in the amount of $301,667 for rent due and $170,235 for restoration. 195 It was a judgment that the YP&C Co. directors deemed sufficiently “satisfactory to the Company.” 196 In the period before the judgment was rendered, however, the company had already commenced with rehabilitation of the property. Ted and Jeannette Dyer Spencer, working in partnership under the company name of “Spencer & Spencer,” were awarded the contract for overseeing exterior and interior rehabilitation of the property. 197 Hedahl-Martin General Contractors of San Francisco managed the construction, demolition, and general labor. 198 The restoration of the hotel, which Spencer & Spencer estimated at a cost of $380,000, involved removing several temporary buildings, extensive repainting, replacing carpets and drapery, repairing stucco and glasswork, reupholstering and refinishing furniture, repairing walkways, and restoring the hotel grounds. In both the main hotel building and the cottages, Jeannette Dyer Spencer’s intricate hand-painted stencil designs had been either partially or completely obscured when the Navy repainted several of the interior spaces. Moreover, many of the hotel’s original furnishings had been lost or damaged during the hotel’s use as a hospital. When the Navy had initially leased the Ahwahnee, the majority of the hotel’s furnishings had been packed up for transport via train to a storage facility in Oakland. However, en route to the facility, seven of the train cars

192 History of the United States Naval Special Hospital, 41-45.
193 Ibid., 17.
194 Ibid., 7, 16.
196 Ibid.
197 Hil Oehlmann, Letter to Ted Spencer, May 21, 1946, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 7, Subseries 4.2, Box 1, Folder 190.
derailed and plunged into the Merced River, severely damaging much of the Ahwahnee’s furniture.199

Rehabilitation of the Ahwahnee Hotel and Cottages was completed in 1946. While the cottages reopened for guest accommodation in early August, the main hotel building reopened its doors four months later, on December 20, 1946.200

Although hotel operations had resumed in 1946, more changes were on the horizon for the Ahwahnee and the YP&C Co. In 1943, Donald Tresidder had been named president of Stanford University; however, he also retained his duties as president of the YP&C Co. throughout the war, appointing Hil Oehlmann as General Manager. In 1945, Tresidder hired Ted Spencer as the University Architect and Director of Planning for Stanford, although Spencer also continued to be closely involved with the YP&C Co. and the Ahwahnee.201 Just over a year after the Ahwahnee reopened its doors in 1946, Tresidder suffered a heart attack and died at the age of 52 while traveling in New York. Having spent most of his life in Yosemite, and nearly twenty years living in an apartment on the sixth floor of the Ahwahnee Hotel, Tresidder was an integral figure in the development of the YP&C Co. and of the Ahwahnee property. Tresidder had exemplified the close personal work environment at the Ahwahnee, and after his death, Jeannette Dyer Spencer recalled that she and Ted “had known Tresidder in Yosemite as an idealistic, far sighted business administrator, and at Stanford, surrounded by men of genius, had seen him stand out as a leader of men.”202 Tresidder’s wife, Mary Curry Tresidder, whose family had been involved with management of Yosemite concessions since 1899, took over as president of the YP&C Co. in February of 1948. She continued to reside in the Ahwahnee sixth-floor apartment and to oversee YP&C Co. operations until her death in 1970.203

Famous Guests at the Ahwahnee

As a luxury resort hotel in the heart of Yosemite National Park, the Ahwahnee has hosted numerous notable guests throughout the years, including Hollywood celebrities, politicians, and dignitaries. In the first decade after it was constructed, the Ahwahnee Hotel welcomed a multitude of celebrities, including Ginger Rogers, Boris Karloff, Irene Dunne, Helen Hayes, Shirley Temple, Charlie Chaplin, Greta Garbo, Bing Crosby, Walt Disney, Will Rogers, Fred Stone, Jack Benny, and Adolph Menjou.204 Writers Gertrude Stein and Alfred Noyes, and poet Sara Teasdale also stayed at the Ahwahnee in the 1930s. Political figures who stayed at the hotel included Winston Churchill, Fiorello La

200 Hil Oehlmann, “Memorandum to the Board of Directors,” August 7, 1946, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 3, Box 8, Folder 404; Hil Oehlmann, “Memorandum to the Board of Directors,” January 10, 1947, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 3, Box 8, Folder 404.
Guardia, and Lord Wavertree. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt stayed at the Ahwahnee multiple times on her many visits to Yosemite, although she often stayed in the backcountry when visiting the park, preferring camping over luxury accommodations. After the Ahwahnee reopened after World War II, dignitaries and celebrities again became a common occurrence at the hotel. In 1947, the Hollywood film, *The Long, Long Trailer*, was filmed in Yosemite, and the film’s cast stayed at the Ahwahnee during filming. A well-circulated story about a celebrity encounter at the hotel involved a late night noise disturbance coming from the Steinway grand piano in the Great Lounge in January of 1947. When hotel Manager Dick Connett responded with an aim to reprimand the rowdy guests, he found Judy Garland, Lucille Ball, and Desi Arnaz entertaining a crowd of guests at the piano. The Ahwahnee also served as a set for the film *The Caine Mutiny* in 1954. Several Hollywood stars stayed at the hotel throughout the 1950s, including Alan Ladd, Red Skelton, Yvonne DeCarlo, Janis Paige, Eddie Bracken, and Ronald Reagan. In addition to Reagan, three other U.S. Presidents have stayed at the Ahwahnee Hotel: Herbert Hoover, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and John F. Kennedy. However, Kennedy was the only president to stay at the Ahwahnee during his term in office. When President Kennedy stayed in the second floor parlor suite in April of 1962, the hotel cleared all other guests from the second and third floors. The President also brought his own orthopedic mattress, which was delivered via helicopter.

Several foreign dignitaries have also stayed at the Ahwahnee, including Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Ethiopia (1954); King Baudouin of Belgium (1959); Queen Ratna of Nepal (1960); and Mohammed Rezi Pahlavi, the exiled Shah of Iran (1962). The most publicized visit from foreign royalty was the 1983 visit of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip of England. For the Queen’s three-day stay in the sixth-floor Tresidder Suite in March of 1983, the YP&C Co. set aside all rooms at the Ahwahnee Hotel and Cottages, as well as several rooms at Yosemite Lodge for use by the Queen’s staff, press, and secret service.

In recent decades, the Ahwahnee hosted William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, and the cast of *Star Trek IV*, which was filmed in Yosemite in 1988. In 1993, Mel Gibson stayed at the Ahwahnee while filming scenes from the movie *Maverick*. In 1994, an episode of *CBS This Morning* was filmed live from the Ahwahnee Great Lounge, featuring hosts Paula Zahn and Harry Smith. The Ahwahnee has also hosted musicians Marian Anderson, Joan Baez, John Fogerty, Bob Seeger, and members of Metallica. More

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208 Walklet, *The Ahwahnee*, 43; Gene Rose, “Yosemite Rolls Out the Carpet,” *Modesto Bee*, January 24, 1983, Yosemite National Park Archives, Shirley Sargent Collection, Box 6, Folder 85; Edward Hardy, Memorandums Regarding the Queen’s Visit, January 7 and January 20, 1983, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series IX, Subseries 2, Box 3.
recently, First Lady Laura Bush stayed at the Ahwahnee in 2001, and actors Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston were guests at the hotel in December of that same year.\(^{210}\)

In addition to attracting numerous dignitaries and celebrities throughout the years, the Ahwahnee Hotel also served as inspiration for the set design of Stanley Kubrick’s 1980 film, *The Shining*. Many of the sets representing the interiors of the fictional Overlook Hotel in the movie were modeled directly upon the Ahwahnee’s interior spaces, including the mosaic floors, stencil designs, large public spaces, and elevator doors.

**Modern Ahwahnee: 1950s to Present**

Through the end of the twentieth century, the YP&C Co. and subsequent management companies maintained a system of continuous updates and maintenance for the Ahwahnee Hotel and Cottages. As guests’ needs changed throughout the years, some interior spaces were repurposed or remodeled. After the original porte cochère was enclosed by the Navy for use as a baggage room in 1943, the YP&C Co. converted this space into a cocktail lounge called the “Indian Room” in 1951. Robert Boardman Howard, the artist who painted the tapestry mural in the Writing Room, also created a hanging kinetic sculpture known as the “Dancing Indian” for the Indian Room. The cocktail lounge is still in use today, but is now known as the Ahwahnee Bar. In 1959, the Beauty Parlor on the mezzanine floor was permanently closed. The space was converted into an employee sleeping room in 1965, and was later used as an office space.\(^{211}\) In 1987, the former Beauty Parlor was converted into a guest room at the same time that the El Dorado Diggins Bar was converted into a guest suite. In addition, the first-floor Barber Shop also closed permanently in 1959, and was later converted into the General Manager’s and Executive Assistant’s offices. A partition wall was added to the space in order to accommodate both offices. In 1964, an outdoor swimming pool, designed by Ted Spencer, was added at the east end of the Reception Wing.\(^{212}\)

In June of 1971, the YP&C Co. proposed that “the Ahwahnee should be changed to be a core, a center of a large vacation complex on the sunny side of the Valley.”\(^{213}\) As part of this proposal, the company commissioned David Jay Flood and Associates to design additional cottages at the Ahwahnee. The impetus for the proposed expansion was the loss of lodging facilities within the park after the Glacier Point Hotel was destroyed by a fire in 1969, for which the YP&C Co. received a $600,000 insurance settlement to construct replacement facilities the following year.\(^{214}\) Flood’s plan, which proposed

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\(^{212}\) See Section III for architectural drawing of the Ahwahnee Pool.


\(^{214}\) Sargent, *Yosemite’s Innkeepers*, 155; David Jay Flood & Associates, “Progress Report on Planning and Architectural Services for Yosemite Park and Curry Co.,” June 30, 1971, 1, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 3, Box 1, Folder 244; Meeting minutes from July 15 of 1971 also refer to
seventy-five new cottages arranged in eleven clusters located adjacent to the existing cottages, was designed to accommodate 200-250 guests. However, the proposed project for additional cottages never proceeded past the design development stage. The exact reasons for the cancellation of the project are not known; however, in June of 1971, the NPS superintendent had issued a mandate that no new lodging facilities could be constructed in Yosemite. Although the YP&C Co. initially assumed that “this roadblock [could] be overcome because the new units would be replacement and not additional construction,” the company eventually abandoned the project.

The 1970s also brought significant changes to the Ahwahnee Hotel complex in terms of its management. The death of Mary Curry Tresidder in 1970 marked the end of the Curry family’s management of Yosemite concessions after more than seven decades in the park. Between 1970 and 1973, the YP&C Co. was purchased and sold by both Shasta Telecasting Corporation and U.S. Natural Resources before the Music Corporation of America (MCA) purchased the company in 1973. This time period also marked a transition in architectural development in Yosemite, as Ted Spencer retired in 1972 after 45 years of working with the YP&C Co.

In 1977, as the hotel approached the fiftieth anniversary of its construction, the YP&C Co., under MCA management, began plans for both interior and exterior renovations to the main hotel building and the cottages. In February of 1977, the hotel complex was also accorded official recognition as a significant cultural resource to the nation in its nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. In the five-year period between 1976-1981, the main hotel underwent a $1.5 million dollar restoration project that included repairing roofing materials, re-staining the stamped concrete paving on the building’s exterior, replacing wood-framed windows with aluminum-framed windows, and installing fiberglass caps on the ends of the massive concrete beams that projected from the building’s exterior in order to prevent further deterioration due to freeze-thaw cycles.

The restoration of the Ahwahnee also involved an extensive interior renovation and redecorating project that was undertaken in 1979-80. Marian Vantress, a San Jose-based interior designer, directed a design plan that aimed to “restore [the hotel] to its original

“the Internal Revenue requirement that the Glacier Point fire settlement money has to be invested in something functionally the same as the Glacier Point Hotel and by September 30.”

Meeting Minutes, Executive Committee of Yosemite Park & Curry Company, June 26, 1971, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 6, Box 2, Folder 551.


Thomas Mulhern, Jr., Memorandum to Associate Regional Director of Resource Management and Planning, Western Region, Re: Proposed Exterior Restoration of the Ahwahnee Hotel, September 1, 1976, Yosemite National Park Museum Files, Collection 1026: Ahwahnee Hotel, 1976-85; “Welcome to the Ahwahnee,” Public Announcement regarding restoration/refurbishment, 1979, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 8, Subseries 1, Box 1, Folder 29.
splendor.”  Vantress reinstated the original “Ahwahnee Indian theme,” and she coordinated the interior design effort with the intent to complement the original stencil designs painted throughout the hotel and cottages. Additionally, California Indian baskets and khilim rugs from the original hotel décor were brought out of storage and placed in frames and display cases in the guest rooms and public spaces of the hotel and cottages.

In 1987, the hotel’s status as a nationally significant property was bolstered by its nomination as a National Historic Landmark. The NHL nomination celebrated the Ahwahnee as an “architectural gem of monumental luxury,” and as “a crown jewel of the National Park System.” Acknowledging the hotel’s architectural significance, the nomination commemorated the Ahwahnee’s “artful contributions to the ambience of the Yosemite experience.”

The early 1990s brought a significant transformation in the ownership and management of the Ahwahnee and all other concessions buildings in Yosemite National Park. Up until this time, the YP&C Co. and other concessionaires had owned the buildings that housed their hospitality facilities in Yosemite. However, after MCA was purchased in 1990 by Matsushita Electrical Industrial Company, a Japanese corporation, many Americans reacted negatively to the idea of foreign ownership of National Park buildings. The U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Manuel Lujan Jr., decried Japanese ownership of buildings in Yosemite National Park and pressured MCA to sell the YP&C Co. In 1991, MCA agreed to sell the YP&C Co. to the National Park Foundation, a nonprofit organization, effective upon the expiration of MCA’s contract in 1993. After acquiring ownership of the properties, the National Park Foundation subsequently donated all buildings previously owned by the YP&C Co. to the NPS, effectively transferring ownership to the American people. In 1993, a concessions management contract was awarded to Delaware North Companies (DNC) to manage hospitality facilities in Yosemite National Park, including the Ahwahnee Hotel. This contract is set to expire on January 31, 2015.

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220 Ibid.
222 Laura Soulliere Harrison, National Historic Landmark Nomination for the Ahwahnee Hotel, Yosemite National Park, California, 1987, 4, 7.
223 Ibid.
225 Ibid.
In 2006, the Ahwahnee Hotel developed area was included in the National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Yosemite Valley Historic District. Both the main hotel building and the cottages, as well as the designed landscape, were deemed as contributing to the district’s significance.\textsuperscript{227}

Today, the Ahwahnee Hotel retains its original function as an upscale hotel for visitors to Yosemite Valley. The hotel’s innovative use of materials and unique architectural and interior designs are still prominent today. The hotel stands as a significant example of monumental rustic architecture, and as the last of the “grand lodges” conceived and promoted by Stephen T. Mather. Despite minimal exterior and interior alterations, the hotel retains its integrity of design, location, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

\textsuperscript{227} Ethan Carr et al., National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Yosemite Valley Historic District, Yosemite National Park, California, 2006, 42-46.
PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

*A note on names of rooms in the Ahwahnee Hotel:
Several of the hotel’s public spaces have different names today than when the hotel was originally constructed. In general, this report will refer to rooms by their historical names, unless the room has been repurposed; in which case, the current name for the room will be used. A listing of historic and contemporary room titles is as follows:

Rooms that have changed names but retain the same function:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Room Name</th>
<th>Current Room Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing Room</td>
<td>Mural Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Room</td>
<td>Winter Club Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Lounge</td>
<td>North Mezzanine Lounge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rooms that have been repurposed and no longer serve their original function:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Room Name</th>
<th>Current Room Name</th>
<th>Other Historical Room Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Porte Cochere (original)</td>
<td>Ahwahnee Bar</td>
<td>Baggage Room (1943-51), Indian Room (1951-82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barber Shop</td>
<td>General Manager’s Office/Executive Assistant’s Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty Parlor</td>
<td>Guest Room 117</td>
<td>Offices (1965-1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Dining Room</td>
<td>Guest Room 118 (Diggins Suite)</td>
<td>The El Dorado Diggins Bar (1934-1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Check Room</td>
<td>Accessible Restroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projection Room</td>
<td>Business Center</td>
<td>Office (Unknown date - 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager’s Office/Secretary’s Office</td>
<td>Guest Room 116</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth Floor Roof Garden</td>
<td>Guest Rooms 601, 602, 604, 605, and 607</td>
<td>Tresidder Apartment (c. 1928 – 1971)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth Floor Covered Balcony</td>
<td>Guest Room 603 (Sun Porch)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character:

The Ahwahnee Hotel is a monumental rustic building that exhibits characteristics of both Arts & Crafts and Art Deco styles. Designed both as a national park “grand lodge” and also as a luxury resort hotel to cater to a wealthy clientele, the hotel’s design and use of materials are truly unique. The rough-cut, native granite masonry on the building’s exterior contributes to a sense of “blending” with the surrounding environment, a characteristic that was influenced by the Arts & Crafts movement. The exterior concrete walls are stained and shaped to create the illusion of wood
construction, a technique that Underwood utilized in order to maintain a rustic appearance while still fulfilling the requirement for the hotel to be a “modern,” fireproof building. The hotel’s interiors maintain the original California Indian Basket inspiration and still showcase the original works of art displayed on the walls of the public spaces. Several items from Ackerman and Pope’s eclectic assortment of furnishings from around the world are still in use throughout the hotel. The Ahwahnee retains many of its original character-defining features, and continues to present a striking presence in Yosemite Valley.

Two of the principal character-defining features of the hotel are its setting and orientation. These aspects were deliberately chosen and designed to maximize the views of Yosemite Valley’s natural features from the hotel windows, while also capitalizing on the Ahwahnee’s location on the “sunny side” of the valley. In November of 1927, YP&C Co. president Don Tresidder composed a memo for NPS Director Stephen Mather, entitled “Memorandum on the Ahwahnee Development.” In this memo, Tresidder described the “reasons for selecting present site” as follows:

The Ahwahnee is located in such a way as to have superb views which embrace Glacier Point, Half Dome, Yosemite Falls, [and] the Royal Arches. There are very few places in the Yosemite where such magnificent view could be obtained. It also offered a location ideally situated for winter and summer business because it afforded a maximum amount of available winter sun and during the summer had sufficient forests surrounding it to relieve the extreme heat of the north wall of the valley.  

In order to maximize views from the hotel, the Ahwahnee was constructed in an irregular Y-shape, with three primary wings. Massive, floor-to-ceiling picture windows in the spacious Great Lounge, Solarium, and Dining Room were designed to frame the surrounding views and provide for a blending of indoor and outdoor spaces, a practice that corresponded with the ideal of “outdoor living” that was promoted by the American Arts & Crafts Movement. The Arts & Crafts influence in the Ahwahnee is also evident in the hand-crafted wrought iron light fixtures, fireplaces designed in an inglenook configuration, and the emphasis on Native American motifs throughout.

While Arts & Crafts elements comprise several of the Ahwahnee’s character-defining features, other components of the hotel’s interior design scheme reflect Art Deco influences. The use of “modern” materials combined with geometric, Native American-inspired designs is evident in the concrete and rubber tile mosaic floor designs in the public spaces. The six original geometric, multicolored rubber tile mosaic designs inlaid into the floor in the Registration Lobby are still in place today. Floors throughout the Registration Lobby, Elevator Lobby, Dining Room, Solarium, and other public rooms are acid-stained, polished concrete with etched designs in

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228 Donald Tresidder, “Memorandum on the Ahwahnee Development,” Yosemite National Park, November 12, 1927, 1.
geometric shapes. Additional interior character-defining features include works of art incorporated into the hotel’s public spaces, including the Basket Mural painted above the fireplace in the Elevator Lobby, the painted tapestry mural that covers the north wall of the Writing Room, and the ten geometric stained glass panels at the top of each of the Great Lounge windows. Hand-painted stencils in colorful geometric designs inspired by California Indian baskets adorn the tops of walls in the Registration Lobby, hallways, and guest rooms, as well as along the edges of the massive ceiling beams in the Great Lounge. Geometric stencils are also painted on the upper sections of the Dining Room walls, around elevator doors, and on the transoms for each of the guest room doors. Although many of the original furnishings and textiles are no longer in use, the effect of Pope and Ackerman’s eclectic assemblage of international items is still somewhat intact, as several of the original Middle Eastern rugs are currently displayed on walls and in glass cases throughout the hotel’s public spaces.

The Ahwahnee’s interior and exterior spaces are also characterized by noticeable contrast between spacious public rooms and small, intricate design details. The massive expanses of the high-ceilinged Great Lounge and Dining Room are juxtaposed against small, detailed hand-painted stencils throughout the building. In addition, the juxtaposition of modern materials and techniques against traditional, rustic, and historic elements is evident throughout the hotel. In order to maintain the rustic appearance of the hotel while fulfilling the YP&C Co’s requirement that the building be fireproof, Underwood utilized concrete as an exterior building material but created the illusion of rustic wood walls. The technique of using “modern” materials while referencing historic designs was also utilized on the interior of the hotel in the concrete and rubber tile mosaic floors.

The Ahwahnee Hotel maintains a high level of integrity, as most of the original features that defined the building’s character when it was first constructed are still prevalent today. The exterior and interior design, materials, and finishes are unique to the building, yet reflect elements of broader movements, including the American Arts & Crafts and Art Deco styles. The hotel’s character is also defined by its setting in Yosemite Valley, and the use of native materials and rustic finishes that contribute to a sense of harmonizing with the surrounding landscape. The eclectic interior décor scheme and the California Indian basket inspiration are also still visually evident throughout the building, and continue to contribute to the Ahwahnee’s character.

2. Condition of fabric:

Exterior

The exterior concrete siding is in fair condition. The effects of weathering and moisture infiltration through time have caused some corrosion of the steel frame, which has led to cracking and spalling in some concrete surfaces.\(^{229}\) Cracks have been

patched and repaired throughout the hotel’s history, and many of the concrete beam ends and rafter tails were repaired by the installation of protective fiberglass caps during the hotel’s 1977-1980 restoration project.  

Exterior granite masonry is generally in good condition. Small amounts of biological growth are evident, including algae, lichens, and fungi; however, these are natural occurrences on stone masonry and are not structurally problematic. Mortar joints have some limited cracking, and some previous mortar repairs are visible where a different colored mortar was used.

Exterior log construction is in good condition, except in the case of some balcony railings, which are in poor condition. Some boreholes from woodpecker activity are evident on the Lounge Wing, and limited moisture damage is present at the base of the log columns in the Dining Wing. Balcony railings are in poor condition due to rotting and moisture damage, contributing to unstable conditions at some balconies.

Doors and windows are in fair to good condition, with some areas showing signs of wear or deterioration due to weathering and moisture intrusion. Some of the stained glass windows in the Great Lounge also show signs of lead deformation and chemical degradation of the glass.

The slate roof was installed in 2005, and is in good condition.

**Interior**

The interiors are generally in fair to good condition. While several of the original finishes and materials are still in use in the hotel, some components have been updated or replaced throughout the hotel’s history. The original etched concrete floors throughout the ground floor and part of the first floor are in fair condition, and exhibit some cracking. The stained finishes have faded so that the original colors are only faintly visible in some locations. The rubber tile floor mosaics in the Registration Lobby are in fair condition, with several tiles exhibiting cracking, hardening, and warping. The wood floors in the Great Lounge are in fair condition, showing signs of wear consistent with heavy foot traffic. Carpeting throughout the guest rooms, hallways, and public spaces is generally in good condition, as it has been replaced regularly.

The textured plaster walls throughout the hotel’s interior spaces were originally integrally colored; however, all wall surfaces have since been painted. The painted wall surfaces are in fair to good condition. The geometric stencil designs painted along the tops of walls are generally in fair condition; however, some stencils have

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232 Ibid., III-35.
233 Ibid., III-38.
been painted over or repainted through the years. Stencils painted along the ceiling beams in the Great Lounge are in poor condition, with areas of water damage and peeling paint.

Doors and windows throughout the building are in fair to good condition. Most of the interior doors and guest room doors are the original doors; however, nearly all of these have been painted, concealing the original varnished wood finish.

Fireplaces are generally in fair to good condition. However, several of the brick fireboxes presently exhibit deterioration. A repair effort is currently underway during the winter of 2014-15 to repair the fire brick in the fireboxes.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions:

The Ahwahnee Hotel is an irregular, Y-shaped building with seven stories plus an elevator penthouse at the core of the building. Each of the wings of the building has between one and five stories. The hotel also has a partial basement. The Ahwahnee was sited in alignment with the surrounding natural features of Yosemite Valley, so the wings are arranged to maximize views of Yosemite Falls, Half Dome, and Glacier Point. The hotel is comprised of a central core and three primary wings: the Lounge Wing extends to the south, the Dining Wing extends to the northwest, and the Registration Wing extends to the northeast. Two additional wings also extend from the three primary wings: the Kitchen Wing extends north from the Dining Wing, and the Entry Wing extends north from the Registration Wing. The building is approximately 100 feet tall at its highest point, and dimensions are as follows:

- Central Core: Seven stories plus elevator penthouse
  63’ long, 72’ wide

- Lounge Wing: Five stories
  132’ long, 51’ wide; also includes two projecting side rooms that are approximately 28’-6” x 28’-6” each

- Dining Wing: Two stories
  135’ long, 51’ wide

- Registration Wing: Three stories
  116’ long, 51’ wide

- Kitchen Wing: Two stories
  110’ long, 90’ wide

- Entry Wing: One story
  127’ long, 14’ to 70’ wide
2. Foundations:

The foundations consist of concrete spread footings, walls, and grade beams. Although the exact size and layout of the foundations are unknown, the original architectural drawings indicate that they were intended to be relatively massive in order to support heavy vertical loads.\(^{234}\)

3. Walls:

Like the shape and massing of the building, the appearance of the exterior walls contributes to a sense of inclusion in the surrounding natural environment both by utilizing native materials and by creating the illusion of native materials. The corners and angles of the building are defined by massive stone masonry piers that are constructed from rough-cut native granite. The exterior walls of the hotel are constructed from concrete that was formed with milled lumber boards and tinted with an acid stain in order to approximate the color and texture of redwood. While most of the exterior walls are constructed from stained concrete, some walls on the ground and mezzanine floors are constructed from logs or wood siding.

Masonry

The granite piers are not load-bearing, but were constructed over the steel-frame structure of the building. The masonry is regularly coursed, and is constructed from random-sized stones laid with the rough, weathered surfaces exposed in order to create a rustic appearance. When designing the hotel, Underwood specified that the exterior stone masonry “shall be native granite ranging in size from four-man stone to two-man stone,” and that the building should be constructed “to achieve a rough and primitive appearance.”\(^{235}\) In order to create this appearance, Underwood directed that “all stone must be laid with the natural weathered surface exposed and no freshly cut surfaces will be allowed for exterior exposure.”\(^{236}\) The shape of the granite piers also contributes to the building’s rustic appearance, as each pier is flared at the base with a sloping cap, creating a line that mimics the shape of the granite cliffs that tower above the building. Engaged granite piers form the corners of each elevation, and free-standing battered granite piers also define the edges of the open loggia spaces outside of the east and west sides of the Great Lounge. At the south end of the lounge wing, six granite piers in a semi-circle formation form the exterior wall of the Solarium, creating a curved projection at the end of the wing.


\(^{236}\) Ibid.
Concrete

In order to create a fireproof building that still maintained a rustic appearance, Underwood utilized concrete as wall material, but created shapes, textures, and colors that approximated the appearance of wood, presenting the illusion that the building was constructed from native and natural materials. The concrete that comprises the exterior walls was formed using milled lumber boards to create the appearance of a wood texture, and was subsequently stained with acid in order to produce the color of redwood. The concrete walls are scored with both horizontal and vertical lines, which creates the appearance that both horizontal and vertical wood siding were combined. The emphasis on contrasting lines also adds visual interest to the exterior walls and contributes to the sense of contrast that is created by the use of different building materials. The concrete crossbeams that project from the granite piers were also stained and formed to resemble wood beam ends.\(^{237}\)

Wood

While the majority of the exterior walls are concrete and stone masonry, the Dining Wing and the Entry Wing are clad in wood siding and have sugar pine log columns and trusses. The Dining Wing, which consists of six bays comprised primarily of windows, is supported by six massive sugar pine log columns with smaller logs spaced in between. Although the corners of this wing are formed by granite piers like the rest of the wings, the walls are comprised of wood and glass, not concrete. The bases of the walls are sheathed in vertical wood siding painted medium brown, and the space above the windows has vertical log siding. In addition to the vertical log columns and vertical siding, horizontal log beams run the length of the wall along the tops of the windows, interrupting the vertical lines.

At the entry wing, both the porte cochere and the covered entrance walkway are also constructed with log columns. The entrance walkway is open on the east side, and is supported by brown painted log columns. A solid wall of vertical wood siding along the west side of the walkway separates the entrance area from the maintenance shops directly to the west, and also prevents guests from viewing the service yard as they enter the hotel. The porte cochere is also log-framed with open log trusses and paired log columns, but is supported by granite piers at each corner.

4. Structural System, framing:

Although the Ahwahnee was designed to create the appearance that it was constructed from native materials, the structural system of the building is actually comprised of steel framing and concrete. The architect chose concrete as a building material because of the requirement that the hotel be a fireproof structure; however, instead of using reinforced concrete as the structural support of the building, the hotel is supported by heavy steel I-beams. The steel columns and beams have deep truss

girders in some locations. Floors are also constructed from steel floor framing that supports cast-in-place reinforced concrete floor slabs of 2” - 3” thickness. Although the original drawings show the steel beams encased in concrete, several of the columns are encased with metal lath and plaster instead. The exterior granite piers and concrete walls are constructed around the steel framing. Interior walls are built from terra cotta tile or gypsum block with plaster finish.238

Although the hotel is primarily supported by steel framing, the structure of the Dining Room and the covered entrance walkway differ from the rest of the building. The Dining Room is supported by timber log trusses with log purlins and rafters to support the roof. Two 22-inch diameter logs at the end of the Dining Room serve as columns to support the trusses. At the west end of the Dining Room are six granite masonry columns that are hollow in the center. The Entry Wing, which consists of the gift shop, covered entrance walkway, and porte cochere, is also supported by wooden components. Both the walkway and the porte cochere are constructed from timber posts supporting timber trusses. Both the timber components and the steel connection plates and bolts were replaced when these structures were reconstructed in 1988.239

5. **Porches, stoops, balconies, porticoes, bulkheads**:

The hotel has several balconies and rooftop terraces of varying shapes and sizes, as well as two large loggia spaces and extended concrete terraces on the ground floor. On the second, fourth, fifth, sixth, and penthouse floors, the multi-level form of the building creates rooftop terraces that are accessed via adjoining guest rooms. On these terraces, the granite piers that comprise the corners of the walls on the lower stories extend approximately four-and-a-half feet above the terrace floor, forming the corner piers for the open terrace space. Between the granite piers, the guard rails and balusters are comprised of brown painted logs. While the guard rails are constructed from eight-inch diameter logs at a 36-inch height, the balusters are approximately six inches in diameter and are spaced approximately twelve inches apart. At an unknown date between 1980 and 2013, a metal pipe guard rail was installed at a forty-two inch height to improve safety, and additional half-inch steel balusters were installed between the log balusters. The rooftop terraces were originally surfaced with concrete over a membrane roof, but were refinished in 2005. At that time, a new membrane roof was installed over the original concrete slab, and modular concrete pavers were installed as flooring on the second and fifth floors, while composite decking was installed on the fourth floor terrace.240

The building also has eight balconies that extend from guest rooms on the first, second, fourth, sixth, and seventh floors. Each of the balconies is constructed of concrete, and is supported by cantilevered square concrete beams. The beams that support the balconies are configured in sets of three vertically stepped beams, with

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239 Ibid.
240 Ibid., I-41.
the longest beam at the top. Like the concrete that covers other areas of the building’s exterior, the concrete beams are shaped and stained to resemble wood. The ends of the beams are cut into a pyramid shape. The balcony railings have concrete posts that support the same formation of guard rails and balusters as is evident on the rooftop terraces: historic eight-inch diameter log guard rails with six-inch diameter balusters, along with non-historic steel railings.

On the ground floor, the Lounge wing is flanked by two open loggia spaces known as the East and West Loggias. The loggias provide a transition space between the outdoors and the Great Lounge, which is walled primarily with large windows. Each loggia has a slate shed roof that is supported by four granite masonry battered piers, and the West Loggia has a steel fire exit stairway that was installed in 1964. The floors of the loggias are constructed from polished concrete slabs that are stamped in a unique, random geometric pattern that resembles flagstone. This stamped concrete extends as a terrace around nearly the entire hotel, with the exception of the back-of-house and service areas. The concrete was historically stained green with dark red-orange along the stamped lines; however, the color has completely faded in almost all areas of the terraces, and is only visible in some corners of the covered loggias.241

6. Chimneys:

The Ahwahnee Hotel main building has six chimneys. Each chimney is constructed from rough-cut native granite masonry that is regularly coursed with random-sized stones. The chimneys are rectangular in shape, and are constructed in the same style and technique as the granite masonry piers that comprise the corners of the building.

7. Openings

a. Doorways and doors:

The hotel has a variety of types of doors and doorways. Most of the doors that lead into the public spaces on the ground floor are paired doors with a wood panel comprising the lower one-third of each door and a single glazed lite on the upper two-thirds. Most of the original doors are intact and in their original locations; however, in 1981, many of the sets of doors in the public spaces were reversed to make them outward-opening instead of inward-opening. This was done by simply turning the doors so that the interior sides faced the exterior. Original hardware was re-used but changed direction.242 Most of the service doors at the rear of the hotel are either metal or wood plank doors.

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242 Ibid., I-43.
Registration Wing

The main entry leading from the porte cochere and covered walkway into the hotel’s registration lobby consists of a pair of multi-lite glazed doors with sidelights set into a wall of granite masonry. Each door has eight divided lites in a wood frame that is painted black. Flanking the pair of doors is a pair of sidelights with eight lites each, and above the doors is a set of three transom windows. The center transom window has ten divided lites, while each side window has four lites.

Along the southeast wall of the registration wing, five pairs of doors provide passage from the lobby and sweet shop onto the terrace and lawn of the hotel. Each of these pairs of doors is nearly identical to the main entry door, with two glazed doors with eight lites each set in wood frames, along with sidelights and three transom windows above the doorway. These doors are painted brown on the exterior, and are covered by metal-framed fabric awnings that are turquoise in color. Although the awning materials are not original, the location and shape of the awnings is original to the hotel, and the original awnings were an important component of the character of the building’s exterior. Historical descriptions indicate that the original awnings had vertical green and white stripes.

The original porte cochere (now the Ahwahnee Bar) has four pairs of doors along the southeast elevation, providing passage from the bar onto the rear patio. Each door is glazed with a single lite and is wood-framed and painted brown on the exterior. When these four sets of doors are opened, the rear wall of the bar is almost entirely open to the outdoor space. Above the doors are four pairs of transom hopper windows.

The gift shop has one exterior door that leads into the covered walkway at the hotel entrance; however, this door has been closed permanently to ensure that guests enter the gift shop only from inside the hotel lobby. This door is a single-lite glazed door with a wood frame that is painted brown.

Lounge Wing

The massive space of the Great Lounge is defined by its double-story height and floor-to-ceiling windows. On the exterior, along both the east and west sides of the Great Lounge, five bays are delineated by granite piers, with glazing forming the majority of the exterior wall sections. Within two of the five window bays on each side, a pair of entry doors provides passage from the lounge onto the loggias and exterior terraces. Each of these sets of doors consists of two glazed-over-panel doors, with a single lite comprising the top two-thirds of each door, and a wood panel comprising the bottom one-third. The wood sections of the doors are painted dark brown and consist of a double panel with a vertical board-and-batten configuration. Flanking each pair of doors is a set of sidelights. Each sidelight
has six lites in the top section and a double wood panel at the bottom that also is configured in a vertical board-and-batten pattern. Above each doorway, the large windows extend an additional story, up to the high ceiling of the Great Lounge. These windows are configured in the same way as the top sections of the other six windows that run the length of the Lounge wing. Directly above the doors, a set of three windows is comprised of a single central window with forty-two lites (seven horizontal by six vertical), flanked by two tall narrow windows with twelve lites each (two horizontal by six vertical). Above this triple set of windows is an additional set of three windows, with the central window comprised of a colorful, geometric stained glass design, and each side window containing six lites. The windows above the doorways are wood-framed and are painted brown on the exterior.

Extending to the east and west of the Lounge wing are the California Room (Winter Club Room) and the Writing Room (Mural Room). Each of these rooms contains one exterior doorway on the south elevation. The doorways are configured in the same manner for both of the rooms. Each doorway consists of a pair of wood-framed glazed doors with twelve divided lites each. This set of doors is flanked by two chamfered concrete posts that are stained to resemble wood, and two sidelights with twelve lites each. Above each doorway are three transom windows. The center window has fourteen lites while each side window has six lites. The doors, sidelights, and transom windows are all wood-framed with brown painted wood, and are set into the concrete wall and flanked by granite piers on either side of the doorway. A balcony extends from above each of the doorways. This balcony is supported by the two concrete posts that flank the doorway. Four sets of cantilevered beams extend from the wall to support the balcony, and also provide visual interest above the doorway. The beams are configured in sets of three, with the longest beam extending from the top. The ends of the beams are cut in a pyramid shape. The base of the concrete balcony that extends above the doorway also provides a sheltered, shaded space below it.

At the south end of the Lounge wing, the Solarium has two sets of doors set in the east and west elevations of its five exterior glazed walls. The doorways in the Solarium are arranged in the same configuration as the doors in the Great Lounge, except that the Solarium doorways do not have stained glass in the upper panel. Each set of doors consists of two glazed-over-panel doors, with a single lite comprising the top two-thirds of each door, and a wood panel comprising the bottom one-third. The wood sections of the doors are painted dark brown and are configured as a double panel with a vertical board-and-batten configuration. Flanking each pair of doors is a set of sidelights with a wood bottom panel. Each sidelight has six lites in the top section, and a double wood panel at the bottom that also is configured in a vertical board-and-batten pattern. Above each doorway, large windows extend an additional story, up to the high ceiling of the Solarium. Directly above the doors, a set of three windows is comprised of a single central window with forty-two lites (seven horizontal by six vertical).
flanked by two tall narrow windows with twelve lites each (two horizontal by six vertical). Above this triple set of windows is an additional set of three windows, with the central window comprised of twenty-one lites (seven horizontal by three vertical), and each side window containing six lites. The windows above the doorways are wood-framed and are painted brown on the exterior.

Dining Wing

The entirety of the Dining Wing is occupied by the Dining Room, a massive open room with double-story ceiling height and a gable roof. On the exterior, the southwest wall of the Dining Room is divided into six bays that are comprised almost entirely of glass. Within each bay are two single exterior doors that flank a large picture window between them. There are a total of twelve of these exterior doors along the southwest wall of the wing. Each door is glazed with a single lite comprising the top two-thirds of the door, and a wood panel with three vertical sections comprising the bottom two-thirds. The doors are wood-framed, are painted brown, and are set in between the massive log columns that support the Dining Room. At the southernmost corner of the Dining Wing, two pairs of doors are separated from the rest of the bays by a granite masonry pier. These two pairs of doors are both glazed-over-panel doors with a single lite comprising the top two-thirds of the door and a wood panel comprising the bottom one-third. The doors are wood framed and are painted dark brown. Above the two pairs of doors are two fixed transom windows with six lites each.

Kitchen Wing

The exterior doors of the Kitchen Wing open onto the loading dock area at the rear of the hotel. At the north end of the wing, two hollow metal doors lead to electrical equipment rooms. These doors are painted brown. A set of doors that leads to the loading dock along the east wall of the Kitchen Wing is an original pair of vertical wood plank doors with wire glass lites. An additional pair of swinging doors leads to the loading dock. Each of the two swinging doors is a vertical plank door that is painted brown and has a single narrow lite. The exterior doors that lead to the dishwashing room are non-historic metal doors.

Guest Rooms

While the majority of guest rooms do not have exterior doors, some guest rooms have private terraces or balconies that are accessed directly from the rooms. The terrace doorways, including those in Rooms 232-234 (Parlor suite) are paired wood Dutch doors with a single glazed lite comprising the top two-thirds of each door and a single wood panel comprising the bottom one-third. The upper portion of each door can be opened separately from the bottom portion, allowing for additional air flow. One of the terrace doorways on the fourth floor is configured slightly differently, as the glazed portion of each door has six lites instead of a
single lite. All of the terrace doorways are currently painted dark brown on the exterior. Balcony doorways are comprised of paired French doors that are wood-framed and glazed with a single lite. The balcony doors are also currently painted dark brown on the exterior.

b. Windows and shutters:

The Ahwahnee contains a diversity of different types of windows throughout the building. The large windows that surround the public spaces in the hotel are distinctive character-defining features that correspond with the building’s design and setting, as the windows were created to frame the majestic views of the surrounding landscape in Yosemite Valley. In order to emphasize the views and provide for a blending of indoor and outdoor spaces, the Great Lounge, Dining Room, and Solarium were designed with walls comprised almost entirely of windows. The massive window-walls and large picture windows throughout the hotel’s public spaces also provide a setting for contemplation of the outdoors, which was a primary tenet of the Arts & Crafts Movement and the development of Rustic style architecture in the national parks. The windows in the guest rooms are aluminum sliding windows flanked by bright turquoise shutters, which also contribute to the distinctive appearance of the hotel’s exterior.

Registration Wing

All of the glazing on the exterior of the Registration Lobby is incorporated into the doorways and doors; additional windows on the upper floors are described in the Guest Rooms section.

Lounge Wing

The most distinctive windows in the hotel are the massive, floor-to-ceiling windows that run the entire length of the east and west elevations of the Great Lounge. Each of the five bays on both sides of the room is comprised almost entirely of glass, and is topped by a distinctive stained glass panel in a multi-colored, geometric, Native American-themed design. Each bay is flanked by granite piers, and consists of three levels of fixed windows set in brown painted wood frames. On the lower level, a central window with twenty-one lites (seven horizontal by three vertical) is flanked by a pair of narrow side windows with six lites each. Above these three windows, the middle level of windows consists of a larger central window with forty-two lites (seven horizontal by six vertical) that is flanked by a pair of narrow side windows with twelve lites each. The top tier of windows is comprised of a central stained glass window with two narrow side windows of six lites each. Each of the ten stained glass panels is a unique design created by Jeannette Dyer Spencer, the artist and interior designer who also designed the Basket Mural above the Elevator Lobby fireplace, as well as the geometric stencil designs painted on the ceiling beams in the Great Lounge. The
stained glass windows display intricate, symmetrical geometric designs created from tiny segments of red, yellow, green, blue, orange, and turquoise colored glass. These designs correspond with the design scheme developed by Phyllis Ackerman and Arthur Upham Pope for the Ahwahnee’s interiors, which used California Indian baskets as inspiration. The use of Native American motifs and handcrafted stained glass windows was also a common feature of Arts & Crafts construction. The Great Lounge windows extend to a height of approximately twenty feet, and are eleven feet wide. Beneath each set of windows, the wall is sheathed in vertical wood board-and-batten siding that is painted brown, and above each set of windows, the wall is comprised of stained concrete.

The California Room (Winter Club Room), which extends from the east elevation of the Lounge Wing, and the Writing Room (Mural Room), which extends from the west elevation, each have one large set of fixed windows in addition to the glazed sections that surround the doorways. These sets of windows are nearly identical in appearance from the exterior; however, in the California Room, the windows face east, and in the Writing Room, the windows face west. The windows are configured as a set of three, with a central window comprised of thirty divided lites (five horizontal by six vertical) flanked by two narrow side windows of twelve lites each. These windows have wood frames that are painted brown. Below the window, the wall is sheathed in brown painted wood board-and-batten siding. A balcony projects from above the window, providing shade for the space below it.

The Solarium, which occupies the south end of the Lounge wing, has five exterior walls that form a partial octagon, maximizing views in multiple directions. Each of the walls is flanked by granite piers and is comprised nearly entirely of windows, with two walls containing doorways and three walls containing massive picture windows. The three end walls each consist of two levels of windows. The lower level contains a large, single, fixed picture window measuring approximately twelve feet high by five feet wide. This window is flanked by two narrow side windows of twenty-seven lites each. Above this set of windows is an upper window with thirty-nine lites (thirteen horizontal by three vertical). The windows are all set in wood frames that are painted brown. Beneath each set of windows, the wall is sheathed in vertical wood board-and-batten siding that is painted brown.

**Dining Wing**

The Dining Room walls are also comprised principally of windows. Along the southwest elevation, six bays are delineated by log columns. Each of these six bays is comprised of six windows and two doors. In the center of each bay is a large, fixed picture window that measures approximately twelve feet high by five feet wide. This picture window is flanked by two doors on the lower half and two narrow side windows on the upper half. Each side window has eighteen lites.
(three horizontal by six vertical). Above this tier of windows is an upper tier of three windows consisting of a central window with fifteen lites (five horizontal by three vertical), flanked by two narrow side windows with nine lites each. Log columns and horizontal beams are placed within each bay to delineate between each of the six windows. While the logs are stained brown, the wood frames and muntins of each of the windows are painted turquoise.

At the northwest end of the Dining Wing, a large bay projects under the gable, with windows on the southwest, northwest, and northeast elevations. The sets of windows on the southwest and northeast elevations are nearly identical to the windows that line the southwest wall; however, instead of two doors flanking the lower half of the picture window, there are two narrow side windows with nine lites each. At the gable end, the windows are configured in the same formation as on the sides of the bay, but have an additional set of three windows at the top. The set of windows at the northwest end of the Dining Room is approximately twenty-eight feet in height, and provides a striking appearance on both the exterior and the interior of the building. The central window in the top tier of windows is pyramid-shaped, following the lines of the gable roof. This window has thirty-two lites (eight horizontal by four vertical). Flanking the central window are two side windows with seven lites each. Like the other Dining Room windows, these windows are framed by turquoise-painted wood. The set of windows at the end of the Dining Room is flanked by two massive granite piers that form the corners of the bay.

Guest Rooms

The guest room windows are aluminum sliding windows with four lites each. The aluminum windows were installed during the hotel’s major restoration project from 1977-1980. The original guest room windows were wooden casement windows. A distinctive feature of the guest room windows are the brightly painted wooden shutters on the exterior. Although the shutters are not operable and are fixed to the side of the building, their color provides visual interest to the exterior of the building, and they are important character-defining features. The shutters are today painted a bright turquoise color; however, they have been repainted on multiple occasions in different shades of green. The aluminum window frames are painted black; however the original wood windows were painted the same color as the shutters.

Sixth Floor

The sixth floor apartment was originally designed as a “roof garden” for entertaining and dancing; however, shortly after the hotel opened, it was converted into an apartment for Don and Mary Tresidder. The windows on the sixth floor differ from those in the rest of the hotel. On the south and east elevations are three sets of casement windows arranged in sets of three or five.
These windows are comprised of leaded glass in a chevron pattern, and are original to the building. On the exterior, the wood frames of these windows are painted turquoise. Also on the east and south elevations, the original covered balcony space now consists of three sets of floor-to-ceiling accordion windows. Each set is comprised of four tall, narrow windows with five lites each. These accordion windows are wood-framed and are painted white. From the exterior, the original log guard rails and balusters are still intact outside of the windows.

8. Roof

a. Shape, covering:

The building is covered by a series of moderately sloped roofs (5:12 pitch). The roofs are clad in Vermont slate with copper flashings, gutters, and downspouts. These roofing materials were installed in 2005, replacing in kind the existing roof covering. Although original drawings show that the initial intent was to cover the roof with wood shakes, this plan was changed at some point before construction, and the original roofs were clad in slate. While all of the upper floors, the Lounge Wing, and the Kitchen Wing have hipped roofs, the Dining Wing has a gable roof with the gable running the length of the wing. The East and West Loggia that extend from both sides of the Great Lounge each have shed roofs. The long entrance walkway has a gable roof, and the porte cochere has a hipped roof.

The complex roof system consists of several levels of roofs, with upper roofs designed to drain onto lower roofs. Throughout the building’s history, this design proved to be problematic due to the heavy snow and ice loads that would collect on the eaves of upper roofs and then fall onto lower roofs, causing damage to the slate roofing. Despite installations of snow guards on upper roofs, the damages caused by snow and ice fall necessitated reroofing on multiple occasions—in 1953, 1986-90, and 2005. In 2005, a new system was installed to alleviate the problem of falling ice and snow by reducing ice buildup on upper roofs. This system involved mounting copper eave-edge roofing panels with integral electric heating elements and installing heated copper downspouts and snow guards on upper roofs.

b. Cornice, eaves:

The eaves extend approximately four feet from the walls of the hotel, contributing to the rustic appearance of the building and also serving to protect the exterior walls from the effects of weathering. The roofs are supported by concrete rafters that are stained to resemble wood timbers. Due to weathering and the effects of freeze-thaw cycles, the ends of the exposed rafter tails began to deteriorate several decades after construction, showing damage from corrosion and spalling. When the hotel began a major restoration project in 1977, the damaged ends of the rafters were repaired as part of a multi-year project carried out by architect Walter
Sontheimer along with San Francisco contractors Western Waterproofing and Western Art Stone. The repair and restoration of the rafters involved cutting back the damaged ends of the rafters and replacing them with fiberglass end caps. This method was utilized to repair and reinforce the ends of 480 of the building’s concrete roof rafters.

c. Dormers, cupolas, towers:

A small elevator penthouse extends above the sixth floor. This room houses elevator equipment and also provides access to a service balcony. The elevator penthouse is a rectangular room, approximately 15’ x 16’, and is sided with stained concrete walls. The slate roof of the elevator penthouse is hipped with the same wide eaves and exposed rafter tails found elsewhere on the building.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor Plans and Circulation

The Ahwahnee Hotel is an irregular, Y-shaped building consisting of a central core, three primary wings, and two additional wings that extend from two of the primary wings. While the central core of the building is seven stories high, each of the wings has between one and five stories. The three primary wings are the Registration Wing, which extends to the northeast; the Lounge Wing, which extends to the south; and the Dining Wing, which extends to the northwest. The two additional wings are the Kitchen Wing, which extends north from the Dining Wing; and the Entry Wing, which extends north from the Registration Wing.

The complex floor plan of the hotel includes double-loaded corridors of guest rooms on the upper floors, with registration and public spaces located on the ground floor and part of the first floor. Many of the unique character-defining features of the Ahwahnee’s interior are found in the hotel’s spacious public rooms. The hotel was designed with the idea that guest rooms would be used primarily as sleeping and dressing spaces, while public spaces like the Great Lounge, Dining Room, Writing Room, and Solarium would be the locations where guests would spend the majority of their time socializing or contemplating the views of Yosemite Valley framed by the hotel’s massive windows. Thus, while the Ahwahnee’s public spaces were designed on a grand scale and were highly embellished with artistic decoration, most guest rooms were not designed to be very large or extravagant spaces. In addition, while the hotel has only one hundred guest rooms, the public spaces were designed to hold up to five hundred guests. The large capacity of the public rooms was intended to accommodate guests from several cottages, or “bungalows,” that the YP&C Co. planned to construct on the grounds of the hotel. However, while the company initially intended to construct up to three hundred of these auxiliary buildings, only

244 Ibid.
eight cottages containing twenty-four guest rooms were ultimately installed on the site. Therefore, the massive Dining Room, Great Lounge, and other public spaces in the main hotel building appear relatively large in comparison to the number of guests that can be accommodated in the hotel.

Ground Floor

The main guest entrance to the hotel is on the north side of the Registration Wing. Guests enter the building through the Entry Wing, an entry sequence that is comprised of a porte cochere and covered walkway that connects to a pair of doors that leads into the Registration Lobby. The Entry Wing also contains the hotel gift shop, which is entered from the interior of the Registration Lobby; however, the gift shop historically had an additional entrance on the exterior of the building along the covered walkway. At the northeast end of the Registration Wing is the Ahwahnee Bar, which occupies the location of the original porte cochere. Although this porte cochere was never actually used for its intended purpose, the view into the hotel from this location represents the original designed view that the architect intended for guests to encounter when initially entering the Ahwahnee. The Ahwahnee Bar has three interior doorways that connect into the Registration Lobby, as well as four exterior doors that lead to an outdoor patio along the southeast wall. The remainder of the Registration Wing consists of a Registration Lobby, Sweet Shop, hallway, administrative offices, and a Men’s Restroom.

At the southwest end of the Registration Wing, the entrance hallway leads into the Elevator Lobby, which occupies the ground floor level of the Central Core of the hotel building. The north wall of the Elevator Lobby includes a pair of elevator doors, a stairway leading up to the North Mezzanine Lounge, and a door to a service corridor that leads to the Kitchen Wing. The west wall of the Elevator Lobby contains a vestibule that connects to the doorway into the Dining Room. At the center of the south wall of the Elevator Lobby is a masonry fireplace constructed of jasper stone. A large, colorful mural depicting a stylized California Indian basket motif is painted on the wall above the fireplace. Flanking the fireplace are two large, double-height open doorways that lead into the Salarium. A doorway on the west side of the Under Lounge leads into the Writing Room (Mural Room), and a doorway on
the east side of the Under Lounge leads into the California Room (Winter Club Room).

The floor plans of the Writing Room and California Room mirror each other. Both rooms are square and have the same fenestration patterns. In the Writing Room, a large picture window occupies the west wall, an exterior doorway opens from the south wall, and a fireplace is located in the northeast corner. The Writing Room also contains a toile peinte ("painted tapestry") wall mural that comprises the top half of the entire north wall. In the California Room, a large picture window occupies the east wall, an exterior doorway opens from the south wall, and a fireplace is located in the northwest corner.

The Solarium is a semicircular room that comprises the south end of the Lounge Wing. The north wall of the Solarium consists of a jasper masonry fountain that is flanked by the pair of open interior doorways that lead into the room from the Under Lounge. A stairway located on the west side of the fountain connects to the Tudor Lounge on the mezzanine floor. The landing for the stairway creates a projecting balcony directly above the fountain. The south side of the Solarium consists of five glazed walls configured in a partial octagon shape. Two of these glazed wall sections contain pairs of exterior doors that lead outside onto a surrounding patio.

The Dining Wing extends northwest from the central core, and is entered on the ground floor through the west side of the Elevator Lobby. The massive Dining Room occupies the entirety of this wing. The long, rectangular room is two stories in height and has an open-beam ceiling with log trusses. The southwest and northwest walls of the Dining Room are largely glazed with floor-to-ceiling windows. The northeast wall contains service doorways that connect to the adjacent Kitchen Wing, which extends north from the Dining Wing.

The Kitchen Wing is comprised of the Kitchen and auxiliary spaces, including a dishwashing area, bakery, an employee dining room, and storage areas. From the interior of the hotel, the Kitchen Wing is accessed either from doorways along the back wall of the Dining Room or from a vestibule located along the north wall of the Elevator Lobby. The east wall of the Kitchen Wing contains four exterior doorways that open onto the loading dock area on the north side of the building.

First Floor (Mezzanine)

The First Floor contains several different types of rooms with both public and private functions. Public rooms located on this floor include the North Mezzanine Lounge, the Tudor Lounge, the Tresidder Room, and the Colonial Room. The First Floor also contains guest rooms, storage areas, and an employee locker room.

The First Floor of the Registration Wing contains Guest Rooms 104-116, which are arranged along a double-loaded corridor. Also located along the corridor are a linen
room, mechanical room, and storage areas. The southwest end of the corridor leads into the North Mezzanine Lounge, and the northeast end connects to an exterior stairway. Guest Rooms 104 and 105 share a north-facing balcony located along the northwest side of the Registration Wing.

The First Floor of the Entry Wing is comprised of employee and storage spaces located directly above the gift shop. These spaces are not accessed from the Registration Wing, but are reached from back-of-house entrances at the rear of the building. The spaces include employee restrooms and locker rooms, a concierge office, and a storage space for the gift shop.

The First Floor of the Central Core includes the North Mezzanine Lounge (originally the Women’s Lounge), two guest rooms, and several smaller auxiliary spaces. Along the north wall of the North Mezzanine Lounge are located the elevators, stairway, and Women’s Restroom. The west side of the North Mezzanine Lounge contains doorways that lead to the Accessible Restroom (originally the Women’s Check Room), Guest Room 117 (originally the Beauty Parlor), and Guest Room 118, which is also known as the Diggins Suite (originally the Private Dining Room, later the El Dorado Diggins Bar). The south side of the North Mezzanine Lounge contains the Business Center, which originally served as a Projection Room for projecting films onto the wall of the Great Lounge below. Flanking the Business Center is a pair of open balconies that overlooks the Great Lounge.

At the south end of the Lounge Wing, the Tudor Lounge is accessed via a stairway from the Solarium. The Tudor Lounge is located directly above the Under Lounge and has a similarly configured floor plan. Along the south wall of the Tudor Lounge, two open balconies flank the stairway and overlook the Solarium below. Along the north wall are two wood-framed casement windows that overlook the Great Lounge. The west wall has a doorway leading to the Tresidder Room, and the east wall has a doorway that leads to the Colonial Room. The Tresidder Room and Colonial Room are located directly above the Writing Room and California Room, and thus also have similarly configured floor plans. The Tresidder Room has two exterior doorways that lead to balconies on the west and south walls, and a fireplace at the northeast corner of the room. The Colonial Room has a fireplace at the northwest corner of the room and two exterior doorways that lead to balconies on the east and south walls.

Second Floor

The Second Floor consists primarily of guest rooms located in the Registration Wing, Central Core, and Lounge Wing. The Registration Wing contains a double-loaded corridor that leads to Guest Rooms 201-217. The Central Core contains Guest Rooms 219, 246, 247, 249, and 250, as well as Storage Areas 2A, 2D, 2E, 2H, 2J, 2K, and 2L. The Lounge Wing contains a double-loaded corridor that leads to Guest Rooms 221-243. The south end of the Lounge Wing contains the Presidential Parlor Suite (Guest Room 232), which connects to both Guest Rooms 230 and 234. The
Presidential Parlor Suite has two exterior doorways that lead to a large outdoor terrace space that is located directly above the Solarium. Guest Rooms 230 and 234 also each have exterior doorways that exit onto the terrace. A fire escape stairway is located along the west side of the Lounge Wing, near the south end.

Third Floor

The Third Floor contains primarily guest rooms located in the Central Core and Lounge Wing. In addition, there are two large storage spaces in the attic space of the Registration Wing. The Central Core contains Guest Rooms 301, 317, 319, and 346-350, as well as Storage Areas 3A, 3D, 3E, 3H, and 3J. The Lounge Wing contains a double-loaded corridor that leads to Guest Rooms 321-343. The south end of the Lounge Wing contains a Parlor Suite (Guest Room 332), which connects to both Guest Rooms 330 and 334. While the Parlor Suite has an identical floor plan to the Presidential Parlor Suite located directly below it on the Second Floor, it does not have an exterior terrace. The attic space above the Registration Wing contains two long, narrow, rectangular storage areas (3B and 3C).

Fourth Floor

The Fourth Floor contains primarily guest rooms located in the Central Core and Lounge Wing. The Central Core contains Guest Rooms 401, 417, 419, 444, and 450, as well as Storage Areas 4A, 4D, and 4F. The Lounge Wing contains a double-loaded corridor that leads to Guest Rooms 421-443. Five guest rooms on the Fourth Floor also have private outdoor balconies, and two rooms have access to a large shared outdoor terrace. Room 417, which is located on the east side of the Central Core, has a private balcony that faces southeast. At the south end of the Lounge Wing, Guest Rooms 426 and 430 share an east-facing balcony, and Guest Rooms 434 and 438 share a west-facing balcony. On the west side of the Central Core, a large terrace extends to the northwest and is shared by Guest Rooms 444 and 450.

Fifth Floor

The Fifth Floor is very compact in comparison with the floors below it, as it consists only of the Central Core area and an attic space above the Lounge Wing. The Central Core contains Guest Rooms 501, 502, 504, 505, and 507, as well as Storage Areas 5D, 5E, and 5H. A large, southeast-facing outdoor terrace is shared between Rooms 502 and 507. The attic space above the Lounge Wing was remodeled in 2011 to improve fire egress for the hotel. The remodeling included the installation of an egress hallway that runs along the length of the Lounge Wing and a stairway at the south end of the wing to connect to an existing stairwell on the fourth floor. Prior to the 2011 remodeling, this attic space was largely unfinished, and included Storage Areas 5F, 5G, and 5M.
Sixth Floor

The Sixth Floor was originally designed as an enclosed roof garden space for public gathering and dancing; however, it was transformed into an apartment for Don and Mary Tresidder shortly after the hotel opened. In 1971, after the death of Mary Curry Tresidder, the Sixth Floor was remodeled into six guest rooms, and it retains this configuration today. Some guest rooms serve functions other than sleeping rooms, and are typically occupied in conjunction with connecting guest rooms. These include the Sun Porch (Guest Room 603), a sitting room with operable glazed window-walls, which shares a conjoining door with Room 601. The Library (Guest Room 602) also functions as a sitting room, and is generally occupied in conjunction with adjoining room 604. The Sixth Floor also contains a small storage room for television equipment (CATV Room) along the north wall. This room was historically part of the kitchen in the Tresidder Apartment, and it still retains some of the cabinetry and finishes from its previous use as a kitchen.

Elevator Penthouse

A narrow metal stairway along the north wall of the sixth floor leads up to the Elevator Penthouse, a small room that houses elevator equipment. The Elevator Penthouse is accessed via a hinged wooden panel in the floor, which is typically secured with a padlock. The Elevator Penthouse also provides access to a small exterior deck space where satellite equipment is located.

2. Stairways

There are several interior stairways in the hotel. While the open stairways in the public spaces of the hotel were designed to contribute to the hotel’s overall décor scheme, the enclosed back-of-house and fire escape stairways are more utilitarian in nature.

The stairway that leads from the Elevator Lobby on the ground floor to the North Mezzanine Lounge is defined by short, stepped sidewalls that are constructed from polished jasper masonry of the same type as the jasper fireplace directly across from the stairway in the Elevator Lobby. Historically, the tops of the jasper sidewalls provided display spaces for California Indian baskets. The steps are poured concrete and are painted a red-brown color. The walls of the open stairwell are textured plaster that is currently painted beige. Non-historic iron handrails have been added along the walls.

The open stairwell leading from the Solarium on the ground floor to the Tudor Lounge on the first floor has concrete stairs that are painted dark green and plaster walls and ceiling that are painted white and yellow. At the midpoint of the stairway, a landing overlooks the Solarium from directly above the jasper fountain. While the landing was originally flush with the wall, it was modified sometime after 1943 in
order to make the stairway less steep. This modification created a cantilevered floor slab at the landing that projects over the fountain. The stairway has varnished wood railings along the walls and an iron balustrade along the landing. Although the balustrade is a replacement of the original, it has a similar design of alternating spiral and square balusters.

The main stairway in the Central Core extends from the north side of the North Mezzanine Lounge on the First Floor up to the Sixth Floor of the hotel. This stairway is fully enclosed, and has unpainted concrete floors and steps, painted plaster walls, and steel railings. The walls are currently painted beige, and the railings are currently painted dark brown. Doors that connect the stairway to each floor of the hotel are hollow metal doors that are currently painted brown or black.

An additional enclosed stairwell runs between the second, third, and fourth floors at the south end of the Lounge Wing on the west side. This stairwell includes a steel stairway with steel railings and concrete steps and landings. The railings and sides of the stairs are painted ivory. Floors are covered with linoleum tile in a dark green color. Walls are gypsum wallboard and are painted beige. This stairway is not original to the building, but was added in 1979-81 as part of the hotel’s effort to comply with the 1980 version of the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) 101 Code.245

The stairway that leads to the basement is located on the north side of the Central Core. This stairway consists of unpainted concrete steps and green and white painted concrete walls. Within the basement, there are two other stairways: a short stairway that leads down to the boiler room, and an additional stairway on the south side of the basement that leads up to a door that is locked and is no longer used. This stairway is currently used as a storage area. Both of the additional basement stairways are unpainted concrete.

3. Flooring

Like many of the wall and ceiling finishes throughout the hotel, the floors of the Ahwahnee’s massive public spaces were designed as works of art created directly on the surfaces of the hotel. Influenced by Art Deco styles, the architect and interior designers conceived of a flooring design plan that combined Native American geometric motifs with modern materials—rubber and concrete. Floors in the corridors, guest rooms, and service areas were generally more utilitarian in design, with carpeted or painted concrete floors.

Registration Wing

The most unique and prominent floor designs in the hotel are the colorful inlaid rubber tile mosaics located in the registration lobby. These mosaics not only correspond with the Native American-themed stencils painted throughout the hotel, but also introduce the arriving guests to the interior décor scheme via brightly colored geometric designs. The registration lobby floor contains six inlaid rubber tile mosaics in shades of red, blue, black, white, green, yellow, and gray. Four of the designs are circular and two are diamond-shaped. In addition, a rubber tile mosaic border delineates the six spaces. Created by San Francisco artist and architect, Henry Temple Howard, the floor mosaics were constructed from rubber manufactured by the Stedman Rubber Tile Company of South Braintree, Massachusetts. The tiles, which were comprised of a newly patented rubber flooring material invented by James H. Stedman, were inlaid into the concrete floors by utilizing brass strips between each tile. All of the original rubber tile mosaics are still intact today in their original configurations, and they still contribute to the character of the hotel’s interior.

The rubber tile mosaics are set into polished, etched concrete floors, which extend throughout the Registration Wing, Elevator Lobby, Dining Room, Under Lounge, Winter Club Room, Solarium, and North Mezzanine Lounge. Like the mosaic designs, these concrete floors embody the Art Deco style technique of combining ethnic designs with modern materials. The concrete floors were designed by San Francisco artist Ernest Born, and were originally colored with an acid stain; however, today the color has largely faded away to reveal the gray finish of the floors. Using Native American motifs as inspiration, Born created geometric shapes and designs which were then etched into the concrete floors in the hotel’s public rooms. These shapes included a diamond and zigzag pattern in the Registration corridor, a more intricate pattern of modified cruciform shapes in the Dining Room, a sunburst design in the Solarium, and grid designs in the Elevator Lobby, Under Lounge, and California Room. An innovative method was used to etch the designs into the concrete floors. In 1932, Don Tresidder provided the following description of this method in a letter to an inquiring architect:

Various designs were cut into the cement itself after it had been finished and allowed to harden for about ten days. This was done by means of a machine consisting of a motor and cutting stone revolving at high speed. Designs were first marked off on the surface of the cement to their exact width. The machine was then permitted to travel on a track which assured accurate direction of travel.

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The highly polished surfaces of the concrete floors were achieved by hand-troweling and finishing via the use of the “finest quality sand” that was “rolled vigorously” upon the floor surface to increase the shine.\textsuperscript{248} Acid stains were utilized to color the concrete floors; however the colors have faded away through the years and are now only faintly visible in some locations. The stains were obtained from the Horn Products Company of Oakland and were mixed using a process which Tresidder described as “entirely secret.”\textsuperscript{249} The stain colors were then applied to the floors with paint brushes. The combination of geometric, Native American-inspired designs with modern materials and methods was a common characteristic of the Art Deco style, which was an influence throughout the hotel.

Both the Gift Shop and the Sweet Shop have vinyl composition tile floors; however they originally had etched concrete floors like the rest of the spaces in the Registration Wing.

The floor in the Ahwahnee Bar is carpeted with loop pile carpet, and the floor of the sunken bar well is exposed aggregate concrete. Originally, this space did not have flooring, as it was initially designed as a porte cochere for automobile entry. The floors were installed when the space was enclosed during the Navy’s use of the hotel in 1943, and the floor surfaces have been refinished multiple times since then.

The original Barber Shop (now the General Manager’s and Executive Assistant’s Offices) currently has carpet tiles; however, the floors were originally concrete.

The Men’s Restroom floors are comprised of tan and brown mosaic tiles laid in a brickwork pattern. Originally the restroom floors were clad in white 1” hexagon ceramic tiles.

**Lounge Wing**

The Great Lounge has wood flooring that runs lengthwise in a north-south direction. The flooring is not original and was replaced in kind at an unknown date. The original floors were oak with quarter-inch wide mahogany accent strips placed at twelve-inch intervals between the oak boards. The replacement flooring also has accent strips placed in the same configuration; however, the replacement strips are of a different type of wood so they do not produce the same color contrast as the original floors.

The Under Lounge and California Room both have polished concrete floors that are etched in a grid pattern. The floors were originally stained with acid stains; however, the stains have faded and the floors are currently dark gray.

\textsuperscript{248} Don Tresidder, Letter to R.H. McDonnell of Burns & McDonnell, Re: Ahwahnee Floor Designs, November 14, 1932, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 3, Box 1, Folder 238.

\textsuperscript{249} Ibid.
In the Writing Room (Mural Room), the floor is wood strip, with light brown stained boards laid in an east-west direction. This floor is a replacement of the original oak strip flooring.

The Solarium has a polished concrete floor with an etched sunburst design comprised of lines that radiate outward from the central jasper fountain toward the massive window walls. This floor was originally stained in shades of yellow and green. Today these colors have faded to reveal the dark gray color of the concrete.

The Tudor Lounge, Tresidder Room, and Colonial Room are carpeted with a patterned broadloom cut pile carpet; however, these rooms originally had wood floors.

**Dining Wing**

The Dining Room floor is also polished concrete and contains an etching pattern that is more intricate than the other concrete floor designs in the hotel. Consisting of a geometric design comprised of modified cruciform shapes, triangles, and zigzag lines, the floor design resembles the California Indian Basket motif found elsewhere throughout the hotel. Originally, the Dining Room floor was stained in shades of green, brown, tan, and red.

The ancillary dining room spaces, consisting of offices and a coat check room, currently have carpet tiles; originally, these spaces had concrete floors.

**Kitchen Wing**

The floors in the Kitchen Wing are clad in 6” x 6” red quarry tile; original floors in the Kitchen were concrete overlaid with linoleum tiles. Ancillary kitchen spaces originally had exposed concrete floors.

**North Mezzanine Spaces**

The North Mezzanine Lounge has a concrete floor that is scored in a checkerboard pattern. Originally, this floor was stained in shades of brown and orange.

The Diggins Suite (Guest Room 118) has the same brown loop pile carpet that is found in guest rooms throughout the hotel. Originally, this space had wood floors.

Guest Room 117 currently has the same brown loop pile carpet that is found in guest rooms throughout the hotel. It originally had a concrete floor.

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251 Ibid., I-70.
252 Ibid., I-78.
253 Ibid., I-86.
The floor in the Women’s Restroom is comprised of tan and brown mosaic tiles laid in a brickwork pattern. Originally, the floor was clad in white 1” hexagonal ceramic tiles that may have also had decorative patterns in dark green and dark red.

The floor in the Accessible Restroom is comprised of tan and brown mosaic tiles laid in a brickwork pattern. Originally, this room had concrete floors.

The Business Center currently has a carpet tile floor, but it originally had concrete floors.

Guest Room 116 currently has brown loop pile carpet that covers the original concrete floors.

**Guest Rooms**

Guest rooms and suites located on the first through fifth floors, including the second and third floor parlors, are carpeted with brown loop pile carpet. Guest rooms were originally carpeted and often also had accent rugs.

The floors in the guest room bathrooms are clad in 1”x1” square white ceramic tiles with geometric patterns in dark red and blue tiles. These floor finishes are replacements of the original 1”x1” square tiles, which were set in similar geometric patterns.

The guest suites on the sixth floor are carpeted with brown loop pile carpeting, with the exception of Room 602 (Library), which has wood floors overlaid with accent rugs. The sixth floor Elevator Lobby has slate tile flooring, and the Audio/Visual (CATV) Room has vinyl composition tile flooring. The Sun Porch is carpeted and has slate tiles installed as accents at the perimeter of the room. Originally, the open space of the sixth floor roof garden had wood floors throughout, with concrete floors in the covered balconies.

**First through Fifth Floor Hallways and Elevator Lobbies**

The corridors leading to the guest rooms on the first through fifth floors, as well as the elevator lobbies on these floors, are carpeted with a patterned broadloom cut pile carpet. These floors were originally carpeted. Historical photos indicate that in the early 1940s, the floors were carpeted with a patterned carpet that was striped in blue and gold; however, it is unknown whether this was the original carpet pattern.

**Storage Areas, Linen Closets, Housekeeping Spaces, Employee Spaces**

The storage and housekeeping spaces originally all had concrete floors. While some of the first and second floor storage areas had etched concrete floors, the maids’ and janitors’ closets, service hallways, and housekeeping spaces had painted or unpainted
concrete floors. Today, these spaces have either painted or unpainted concrete floors. Employee locker rooms also maintain their original concrete floors.

**Elevator Penthouse**

The elevator penthouse originally had a concrete floor. This has since been painted over and wood fiber board has been installed over some floor sections.

**Basement**

The basement floors are unfinished concrete. Although these floor finishes are the same as the original floors, yellow safety lines have been painted on some areas of the floor to denote walking pathways and to define the edges of stairs.

**Maintenance Shops**

The exterior maintenance shops currently have wood, plywood, or dirt floors. It is unclear whether these floors are original.

4. **Wall and Ceiling Finish**

The interior wall finishes throughout the hotel comprise an essential component of Ackerman and Pope’s original eclectic design scheme for the Ahwahnee. The majority of the walls and ceilings in the Ahwahnee’s public spaces and guest rooms are integrally colored, textured plaster with hand-painted geometric stencil designs along the tops of the walls. However, the integrally colored plaster has been painted over and is no longer visible in most rooms. In the hotel’s public rooms, prominent works of art displayed on the walls demonstrate both the Arts & Crafts and Art Deco influences in the Ahwahnee’s interior design scheme. Elements like the large Basket Mural painted directly on the wall in the Elevator Lobby and the geometric stencils painted along the ceiling beams in the Great Lounge exhibit Art Deco influences. At the same time, the massive toile peinte, or “painted tapestry” that covers the upper section of an entire wall in the French Gothic-themed Writing Room demonstrates the Arts & Crafts style. The eclectic interior design scheme conceived by Ackerman and Pope combined motifs inspired by California Indian baskets with both “modern” and traditional design techniques, and this design scheme is still visually prominent today on the wall and ceiling finishes, comprising a significant character-defining feature of the Ahwahnee’s interior.

**Registration Wing**

The walls and ceiling in the Registration Lobby are integrally colored, textured plaster that is currently painted an ivory color. However, these walls were not originally painted, so the integral coloring of the plaster was visible. The lower sections of the walls are covered with a dark wood wainscot with a pattern of vertical
lines and geometric cutouts in a Native American motif. Plastered square columns support the ceiling throughout the Registration Lobby and also define the corners of the registration desk. The columns are painted the same shade of ivory as the walls and ceiling; however, these columns have historically been repainted multiple times, often in dark brown or red. Forming a border along the tops of the walls and at the top of each column are geometric, Native American-inspired stencil designs painted in shades of red, black, green, and gold. These hand-painted stencils, which are found throughout the hotel and cottages, are original to the building and were designed by Jeannette Dyer Spencer.

The walls and ceiling in the hallway that leads from the Registration Lobby to the Elevator Lobby are also textured plaster that is painted in an ivory color. The hallway walls contain the same dark-stained wood wainscot that is found in the Registration Lobby.

The walls and ceiling of the Sweet Shop and the Gift Shop are also textured, integrally-colored plaster that has been painted over, and non-historic stenciling has been added along the tops of the walls. The Sweet Shop also has the same dark-stained wood wainscot with geometric cutouts found in the rest of the Registration Wing.

The original intended porte cochere (now the Ahwahnee Bar) was enclosed during the Navy period in 1943; thus, the walls do not retain original finishes, since this space was originally open-air with granite masonry piers supporting each corner. Today, the northeast and northwest walls are solid, while the southeast and southwest walls are comprised mainly of glazed doors and windows. The northeast and northwest walls are covered with vertical wood paneling that is painted tan, as wells as gypsum board that is painted ivory. The bar is located along the northeast wall, and a recessed booth seating area is located on the northwest wall. The eight original granite masonry piers that line the northeast and southwest walls are visible from the interior of the bar area. The ceiling is painted gypsum wallboard and is not original.

The walls and ceilings in the Barber Shop (now the General Manager’s and Executive Assistant’s Offices) consist of the original plaster that has been repainted beige. A non-historic partition wall made of gypsum wallboard was added to separate the two office spaces.

The Men’s Restroom has plaster walls and ceiling that have been repainted beige. A beige ceramic tile wainscot covers the bottom portion of the walls, extending to a height of eight feet. These finishes have been changed several times throughout the hotel’s history.
Elevator Lobby

The Elevator Lobby walls and ceiling are textured plaster that has been painted in a light shade of beige. Originally, the plaster was integrally colored and was not painted. The flat ceiling has a pair of ceiling beams that run in a north-south direction. The beams are currently painted a dark red-brown color with a faux wood-grain finish; however, they have historically been repainted on multiple occasions. On the south wall, above the jasper stone fireplace, is a massive mural with a California Indian basket motif. Called the “Basket Mural,” this work of art is original to the hotel and was painted directly onto the wall by Jeannette Dyer Spencer. Spencer was an artist and interior designer who was trained in both architecture and stained glass design, and her designs for the stained glass windows in the hotel’s Great Lounge are also still in place today. The Basket Mural design is an image of a series of baskets with geometric and swirl designs, painted in shades of red, green, yellow, white, and black. Spencer described the Basket Mural as “a group of Indian baskets drawn at very large scale in a flat pattern with an outward expanding movement.”\(^{254}\) She also expressed that she considered the mural to be “probably [her] best work at the time.”\(^{255}\) The Basket Mural and fireplace are the central focus of the room and are accented by hand-painted geometric stencils that Spencer designed for the beam above the elevator doors on the north side of the room. The stencils on the beam are painted in shades of red, black, green, and yellow.

Lounge Wing

The high walls and vaulted, beamed ceiling of the Great Lounge are comprised of integrally colored, textured plaster that has been painted over in most areas; however some areas of unpainted plaster finish are visible above the windows and at the south end of the room. The double-story Great Lounge walls are characterized by ten floor-to-ceiling windows that run the length of the room along the east and west walls, each of which has a unique stained glass panel at the top. The geometric designs of the stained glass window panels were inspired by California Indian Baskets, and are complimented by colorful geometric stencils painted along the undersides of the ceiling beams. Originally, the sides of the massive crossbeams also displayed hand-painted stencils in a series of unique square-shaped designs, and the undersides of these beams contained geometric designs at each end. However, these designs were painted over as part of the 1946 restoration of the hotel after the Navy period. Geometric designs painted around the tops of the plaster wall piers were also painted over at the same time.\(^{256}\) Also in 1946, a massive Mondrian style wall mural was painted on the wall above the fireplace at the north end of the lounge. The mural was

\(^{254}\) Spencer, The Life of Ted Spencer, Architect, 76.
\(^{255}\) Ibid.
\(^{256}\) Photos taken during the hotel’s use as a Naval Hospital show that the decorative stencils were still in place in the Great Lounge when it was used as a hospital ward in during 1943-45. Since both the Navy and the YP&C Co. conducted extensive repainting of the hotel interiors after the end of the Navy’s occupation, it is unknown which party is responsible for painting over the stencils on the ceiling beams in the Great Lounge.
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Painted by Frann Spencer Reynolds, the daughter of Ted and Jeannette Dyer Spencer. In 1980, the mural was painted over when the hotel underwent renovations to restore the interior walls to their original 1927 appearance. Currently, the walls and ceiling are painted a light beige color and the ceiling crossbeams are painted dark brown. Original stencils are extant on the smaller beams that run the north-south length of the room and on the corners of the larger crossbeams that run across the room in an east-west direction.

The Under Lounge walls and ceiling are also comprised of integrally colored, textured plaster that is currently painted light beige. The light-colored walls are accented by the ceiling beams, which are painted a dark red-brown color. Originally, the plaster walls were not painted, revealing the integral coloring of the plaster.

Like the rest of the public spaces in the hotel, the California Room (Winter Club Room) has textured plaster walls and ceiling that have been painted over. While the original wall finishes were integrally colored, they are now painted in a shade of ivory. The ceiling beams are currently painted dark brown. Although the room was originally designated as the California Room and contained wall décor themed on California’s early mining history, it was changed to the Winter Club Room after World War II. The room currently has historic skis, snowshoes, and winter recreation equipment adorning the walls. Non-historic wood display cases are also installed along the east wall of the room.

The Writing Room (Mural Room) walls are distinct from the other public spaces in the hotel, and reflect the room’s French Gothic theme. The central focus of the room is a large toile peinte (“painted tapestry”) mural on the north wall that extends the entire length of the top half of the wall. The tapestry, which is largely unaltered from its original appearance, was painted in 1926-27 by Robert Boardman Howard in the mille fleurs style, a fifteenth-century French style of painting that had been revived by the American Arts & Crafts Movement. The tapestry is an “illustrated nature guide” to Yosemite, consisting of images of flora and fauna found in the park. All four walls of the Writing Room, including the space below the mural, are comprised of redwood paneling applied in a rectangular grid pattern. The ceiling is textured plaster with a beige-colored painted finish that covers the original integrally-colored plaster. The ceiling beams are painted dark brown with a faux wood-grain finish.

The Solarium, which occupies the south end of the Lounge Wing, also has textured plaster walls with a painted finish. The five south-facing walls of the Solarium are largely glazed with floor-to-ceiling windows. The plaster surfaces of the walls and ceiling are painted in shades of yellow and ivory; however, these surfaces were originally integrally colored. At the center of the north wall of the Solarium is a jasper stone fountain. The section of wall behind the fountain is comprised of jasper stone masonry up to the height of a small cantilevered balcony that projects from the interior stairway that leads up to the Tudor Lounge on the first floor.

Phyllis Ackerman, “Notes on the Ahwahnee Decorations,” 1927, 3-6, Yosemite Research Library.
The Tudor Lounge, Colonial Room, and Tresidder Room all have walls and ceilings of textured plaster. The plaster is currently painted a light beige color; however, originally, the integrally colored plaster was visible. Ceiling beams are today finished with dark red-brown paint. In the Colonial and Tresidder Rooms, a picture rail trim runs along all four walls at the height of the top of the doors. This trim is currently painted dark red-brown.

**Dining Wing**

The Dining Room is the only room in the hotel in which the walls and ceiling are principally framed with logs. Peeled sugar pine logs form both the wall columns and the ceiling trusses of the open-beam ceiling. The southwest and northwest walls are largely glazed with windows that extend the full two-story height of the room. Each window is divided by log columns and accented with patterned curtains. Massive granite masonry piers also support the ends of the room and frame an alcove that surrounds a picture window at the northwest end of the room. Above this picture window, the wood-paneled wall is painted beige and contains a circular stencil design that is painted in shades of green, black, red, and yellow. The northeast wall is comprised of beige painted plaster panels set between the log columns. A dark wood wainscot extends along this wall to a height of approximately six feet. Forming a frieze along the top of the northeast wall is a set of wood paneled wall sections that are framed by peeled logs. Each section displays a set of three colorful geometric stencil designs painted on a bright green background. The stencil designs are circular and cruciform shapes painted in red, yellow, and black. Wood grilles are set into two of the central wall sections just below the stenciled top panels. The southeast wall, where guests enter the Dining Room from the Elevator Lobby, is supported by massive granite piers. The upper portion of this double-height wall is the location where the private dining room was originally located on the mezzanine floor; however, it is now the Diggins Suite. The wall between the Dining Room and the private dining room above was screened with quatrefoil wood panels that could be opened so that guests could view the Dining Room below. The original panels are still in place, but they are no longer operable. Below the panels is a painted border of geometric stencils and a concrete beam that is painted to imitate wood. Above the quatrefoil panels, the wall is comprised of wood paneling that is painted beige with a red and blue border of geometric stencils. At the center of this upper panel is a circular stencil in a stylized sun design that is painted in shades of purple, yellow, red, and green. The ceiling of the Dining Room is painted bright green in between the peeled log ceiling beams.

Auxiliary Dining Room spaces include the Food and Beverage Manager’s Office, Coat Check Room, Dining Room Manager’s Office, Cold Storage, and additional storage area. The walls and ceilings in these spaces consist of the original plaster, which has been painted over. A non-historic wall comprised of gypsum wallboard was added at an unknown date to divide the Coat Check Room and Cold Storage area.
Kitchen Wing

The double-story Kitchen space and single-story auxiliary spaces that surround the Kitchen originally had walls and ceilings of smooth plaster painted with a glossy finish. Several of the walls and ceilings retain these types of finishes today. In addition to the white painted plaster finish, many of the walls and columns are now covered with stainless steel panels. In the Dishwashing Room, non-historic fiber reinforced plastic (FRP) panels cover the walls, and non-historic vinyl-coated 2x4 panels cover the ceiling. Additional non-historic ceiling materials in the auxiliary spaces include 2x4 lay-in tiles in the Break Room and a dropped acoustical ceiling in the Chef’s Office.258

North Mezzanine Spaces

The North Mezzanine area, located directly above the Elevator Lobby, is comprised of several smaller spaces that serve both public and private functions. Many of these spaces have been remodeled and converted from their original purposes; thus, many of the wall finishes are no longer original.

The walls and ceiling in the North Mezzanine Lounge (originally the Women’s Lounge) are comprised of integrally colored, textured plaster that has been painted over. Today the walls and ceiling are painted beige and the ceiling beams are painted dark brown.

Guest Room 118 (Diggins Suite) retains some of the original integrally colored plaster walls; however, all surfaces have been painted, and some new walls have been added. The walls around the perimeter of the room are painted plaster, while interior walls that were added during the 1987 conversion of the space into a guest room are comprised of painted gypsum board. On the west wall of the bedroom area, a set of wood panels on the wall covers the space where wood shutters originally overlooked the Dining Room. A white painted crown molding runs along the top of the walls. The living room area of the suite has a painted plaster ceiling with beams that run along the north and east walls. The remaining spaces in the suite have dropped ceilings comprised of gypsum board.

Guest Room 117 (originally the Beauty Parlor) has wall and ceiling finishes that are typical of guest rooms throughout the hotel and are comprised of painted plaster. However, the room does not contain the hand-painted stencil designs which are found on the walls of the original guest rooms. Originally, the wall and ceiling plaster in the room was integrally colored, and was not painted.

The walls in the Unisex Accessible Restroom are currently finished with a tile mosaic that is comprised of rectangular ivory ceramic tiles laid in a brickwork pattern. The

ceiling is clad in gypsum board and is painted an ivory color. Originally, the walls and ceiling were plaster and the walls were lined with shelves.

The Women’s Restroom walls and ceilings are comprised of the original plaster, but have been painted over. Walls and ceilings are painted tan and beige. A tile mosaic wainscot covers the lower portion of the walls and is comprised of ivory ceramic tiles laid in a brickwork pattern. The wainscot is not original.

In the Business Center, the walls and ceiling were originally plaster and are currently painted plaster. A non-historic wallpaper border with a geometric stencil design in shades of blue and brown has been applied along the top of the wall.

Guest Room 116 (originally the Manager’s and Secretary’s Offices) has wall and ceiling finishes that are the same as other guest rooms throughout the hotel, with beige paint applied over the original plaster finish. A geometric stencil design is painted along the top of the walls in a beige, blue, and turquoise chevron pattern. It is unknown whether this stencil is original to the space.

Guest Rooms

Standard Guest Rooms on the first through fifth floors have painted plaster walls and ceilings. Originally, the plaster surfaces of the walls and ceilings were not painted, revealing the integral coloring of the plaster. The colors of the original wall and ceiling finishes included shades of yellow, ivory, light salmon, and possibly other colors. Today, these surfaces are painted beige. The original geometric hand-painted stencils are still visible at the tops of the walls in most of the guest rooms; however, some of the stencils have been painted over or repainted. Originally, stencils were also painted as accents on the walls around guest room doorways; however, these stencils have been painted over and are no longer visible in any of the rooms.

The wall and ceiling finishes in the Guest Room Bathrooms are painted plaster with ceramic tile wainscoting on the lower sections of the walls. Walls and ceilings are painted ivory with dark red accent walls. A tile wainscot extends midway up the height of the walls around the room, except around the tub/shower area, where the tile finish extends up to the ceiling. The wainscot is comprised of 1”x 1” white square ceramic tiles with dark red and dark green tiles providing decorative accents. The original integrally colored plaster has been covered with layers of paint; however, plaster samples collected during a recent construction project show that the original wall color in some of the bathrooms was dark yellow.

The Parlor Suites (Guest Rooms 234 and 334), which are located directly above the Solarium at the south end of the Lounge Wing, have octagon-shaped exterior walls. The three south-facing walls in each of the Parlor Suites are comprised predominantly of windows. The wall and ceiling finish is plaster, which was originally integrally colored, but now is painted beige with white trim. Beneath the windows, a wood
wainscot extends along the walls. This wainscot has geometric cut-outs and incised vertical lines in the same pattern as the wainscot in the Registration Lobby area. The wainscot is currently painted white, but it has been painted multiple times in different colors. Geometric stencils run along the tops of the walls in the guest suites that connect to the parlors.

The Sixth Floor wall and ceiling finishes have been modified multiple times since original construction; however, some of the walls and ceilings still retain their original finishes. The 1971 remodeling of the space from the Tresidder apartment into six guest suites involved adding multiple partition walls constructed of gypsum board. However, the original plaster and wood paneled walls also still remain. The Library (Room 602) has wood paneled walls with a square grid paneling pattern and built-in wooden bookshelves on two walls. Ceilings are painted gypsum board, and have been lowered from the original plaster ceilings. Architectural drawings indicate that the sixth floor walls originally had dark wood wainscoting with the same geometric cutout pattern as the wainscoting in the Registration Lobby.

**First Through Fifth Floor Hallways and Elevator Lobbies**

The wall and ceiling finishes in the first through fifth floor hallways and elevator lobbies are painted plaster. Originally integrally colored plaster, the finishes are now painted in shades of beige. The hallways also have colorful geometric stencils painted along the tops of the walls, most of which are original. In some hallways, crossbeams are also painted with colorful stencil designs. The elevator lobbies have geometric, Native American motifs painted on the walls around the elevator doors; however, these designs are not original. Historic photos show that different stencil designs were originally painted on the walls in the elevator lobbies.

**Storage Areas, Closets, Auxiliary Spaces**

Storage areas and closets throughout the hotel are generally used for their original purposes. Original walls and ceilings were plaster; currently the walls and ceilings are painted plaster. Housekeeping spaces retain their original plaster wall and ceiling finish.

**Elevator Penthouse**

The walls and sloped ceiling of the Elevator Penthouse are clad in painted Acoustex panels. These panels were installed over the original exposed concrete wall and ceiling surfaces in 1939 as part of an effort to improve acoustics in the hotel. The ceiling also has exposed steel framing.\(^{259}\)

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Basement

The basement retains its original board-formed concrete walls and painted plaster walls. Walls throughout the basement area are painted green and white. At an unknown date, additional gypsum block walls were added to create a separate storage area at the southeast corner of the basement.

Maintenance Shops

The maintenance shops have a variety of different wall and ceiling finishes, including both painted gypsum board walls and unpainted wood walls with exposed framing.

5. Openings

a. Doorways and doors

The Ahwahnee Hotel has a variety of different types of doors throughout the building, many of which are original. Most of the exterior entry doors to the hotel’s public spaces are paired doors with a wood panel comprising the lower portion and a single glazed lite on the upper portion. Interior doors to guest rooms are typically single panel, solid wood doors with transoms. In public rooms where the walls are largely glazed, such as the Great Lounge and Solarium, doorways were designed to visually fit into the glazing pattern and provide for a blending of indoor and outdoor spaces. In addition to the variety of doors throughout the building, there are also several distinctive open doorways that connect the hotel’s public spaces.

Registration Wing

The main entry leading from the porte cochere and covered walkway into the hotel’s Registration Lobby consists of a pair of glazed doors with sidelights and fixed transom windows. Each door has eight lites set in a wood frame that is stained dark brown. Flanking the pair of doors is a pair of sidelights with eight lites each, and above the doors is a set of three transom windows. The center window above the doors has ten lites, while each side window has four lites.

Along the southeast wall of the Registration Wing, four pairs of doors provide passage from the lobby onto the terrace and lawn of the hotel. Each of these pairs of doors is nearly identical to the main entry door, and consists of wood-framed, glazed doors with sidelights and fixed transom windows. These doors are stained dark brown on the interior, and the wood frames have decorative geometric designs carved into them in diamond and chevron shapes. Also within the Registration Lobby, three doorways connect to the Ahwahnee Bar (the original porte cochere), and an additional doorway connects to the Sweet Shop. Each of these doorways is also configured in the same manner as the entrance doorway.
The Ahwahnee Bar (the original porte cochere) has three interior pairs of doors that lead into the Registration Lobby, four doors that lead to service and storage spaces, and four pairs of glazed doors that connect to an outdoor patio space. The three sets of doors that connect to the Registration Lobby are the original entrance doorways from the porte cochere into the hotel; thus, these were originally exterior doors. These three sets of doors are configured in the same manner as the other six sets of entry doors in the Registration Lobby, and consist of multi-lite glazed doors with sidelights and transom windows. The doors are wood-framed and are painted tan on the side that faces the interior of the Ahwahnee Bar. The four doors that lead to back-of-house and storage areas are solid wood doors with a vertical board-and-batten configuration. These doors blend with the wood paneled wall spaces surrounding the doors, which are also vertical board-and-batten. The doors are painted tan. One of the service doors has a small single lite in the upper portion. Along the southeast wall of the Ahwahnee Bar, four pairs of glazed doors open onto the rear patio, which is also utilized as an area for bar patronage. When these four sets of doors are opened, the rear wall of the bar is almost entirely open to the outdoor space. Each door is glazed with a single lite and has a wood frame that is painted tan on the interior. Above these doors are four pairs of transom hopper windows.

The Sweet Shop has two pairs of glazed doors with sidelights and transoms that are both configured in the same manner as the main entrance doors in the Registration Lobby. One pair of doors leads into the Registration Lobby, and the other pair leads outside onto the terrace and back lawn. These doors are also stained dark brown on the interior.

The main entrance doorway into the Gift Shop from the Registration Lobby consists of a pair of wood-framed, glazed doors with eight lites each. These doors are stained dark brown and are original to the building. The doors also retain their original handles and hinges. The east wall of the gift shop is largely glazed to provide a visual connection for guests entering the hotel from the covered walkway. Historically, an entry door located along the glazed east wall provided entry for guests to access the gift shop from the walkway; however, this door is now fixed and is no longer operable. The door is glazed with a single lite and has a wood frame.

The entry door from the hallway into the General Manager’s and Executive Assistant’s Offices (formerly the Barber Shop) is a historic vertical wood plank door that is currently painted black. Within this office space, a sliding pocket stile and rail door connects the Executive Assistant’s and Manager’s Offices, and a painted flush wood door leads into the Assistant Manager’s Office. These doors are not historic, as they were added after the space was converted into offices in 1965.
The Men’s Restroom door is a historic vertical wood plank door that is currently painted black.

**Elevator Lobby**

The doorway that holds the pair of elevator doors located along the north wall of the Elevator Lobby is the most prominent doorway in the room. This doorway originally exhibited one of the hotel’s most distinctive hand-painted stencils designed by Jeannette Dyer Spencer; however, only part of the original stenciling remains. The doorway consists of two doors that lead to a public elevator and a service elevator. The two baked enamel doors are painted dark red. The wide wood surround is painted black and displays geometric stencil designs painted in red above the doors. Between the two doors, a pair of chamfered, engaged columns also display a pattern of red stencils painted on a black background. The stencils are designed in a geometric motif consisting of diamond and triangle shapes, chevrons, and zigzag lines that correspond with the hotel’s décor scheme based upon California Indian basket designs. Originally, both of the doors were also painted in a geometric stencil design. When the passenger elevator was replaced in 1961, the stencil designs on the doors were painted over in a shade of custom-colored paint referred to as “Ahwahnee Red.”

On the left side of the elevator doors, an additional door leads to a storage space and back hallway. This doorway is also painted red and black, and it is configured in a way that creates a very similar appearance to the elevator doors. However, while the doorway creates the appearance of two red doors flanking a central black panel, the central panel is actually a vertical plank door painted black, and the two red sections are fixed, vertical wood panel walls painted red. The door also displays a sign that reads, “Employees Only,” to differentiate it from the public elevator doors. The doorway has the same wide wood surround as the elevator doors with the same red and black stencil designs painted across the top. While this doorway currently leads to a storage area, the architect’s original drawings identify this space as an Art Gallery. However, aside from the original drawings, no other historical sources indicate that the space was ever used as an Art Gallery.

**Lounge Wing**

Passage into the Great Lounge from the Elevator Lobby is gained through two large, open doorways framed by the painted plaster walls. The two doorways, which flank the massive fireplace, are each approximately fourteen feet high, and are corbelled at the top corners. Above each doorway is an open balcony that overlooks the Great Lounge from the North Mezzanine. Each of the two open balconies has corbelling at the top corners and is lined by a dark-stained wood railing that is carved in a geometric design. At the opposite end of the Great

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Lounge, identical doorways lead into the Under Lounge; however, these doorways are separated by two square, plastered piers, and a third identical doorway in the center of the piers leads into the Under Lounge.

The Great Lounge also has four doorways that provide passage from the lounge onto the loggias and exterior terraces. These doorways occupy the bottom portions of two of the five window sections on each side of the lounge and are configured so that they blend into the glazing pattern in the Great Lounge’s floor-to-ceiling window walls. Each set of doors consists of two glazed-over-panel doors with a single lite comprising the top two-thirds of each door and a wood panel comprising the bottom one-third. The wood sections of the doors are painted dark brown. A pair of sidelights flanks each pair of doors. Each sidelight has six lites in the top section and a wood panel at the bottom. Above each doorway, the large windows extend an additional story, up to the high ceiling of the Great Lounge. These windows are configured in the same way as the top sections of the other six windows that run the length of the Great Lounge. Directly above the doors, a set of three windows is comprised of a single central window with forty-two lites (seven horizontal by six vertical), flanked by two tall narrow windows with twelve lites each (two horizontal by six vertical). Above this triple set of windows is an additional set of three windows. The central window is comprised of a colorful, geometric stained glass design, and each side window contains six lites. The windows above the doorways are wood-framed and are painted brown on the interior.

The California Room (Winter Club Room) has one interior doorway and one exterior doorway. The interior doorway along the west wall, which connects to the Under Lounge, is simply a rectangular opening cut into the plaster wall. The exterior doorway leads onto a patio along the south wall of the room. This doorway contains a pair of wood-framed glazed doors with twelve lites each. This set of doors is flanked by two chamfered concrete posts and two sidelights with twelve lites each. Above the doorway are three additional glazed panels. The center panel has fourteen lites while each side panel has six lites. The doors, sidelights, and upper glazed panels are all wood-framed with brown painted wood.

The Writing Room (Mural Room) has one interior doorway and one exterior doorway. The doors in the Writing Room are configured in an identical manner to the doors in the California Room, except that the interior doorway connects to the Under Lounge along the east wall and is framed by wood paneling on the interior of the room.

The Solarium has two interior doorways and two exterior doorways. The two interior doorways are located along the north wall of the Solarium and connect to the Under Lounge. These two large, open doorways are configured in a similar manner as the open doorways leading into the Great Lounge. Approximately
fourteen feet tall, the doorways are corbelled at the top corners, and, on the side facing the Solarium, are topped by open balconies with dark-stained wood railings carved with geometric designs. The two exterior doorways in the Solarium are located on the east and west walls. Each pair of doors is set within one of the Solarium’s five glazed wall sections. The doorways in the Solarium are arranged in the same configuration as the doors in the Great Lounge, except that the Solarium doorways do not have stained glass in the upper panel. Each set of doors consists of two glazed-over-panel doors, with a single lite comprising the top two-thirds of each door and a wood panel comprising the bottom one-third. The wood sections of the doors are comprised of two vertical panels that are stained dark brown. Flanking each pair of doors is a set of sidelights, each of which has six lites in the top section and a double wood panel at the bottom. Above each doorway, large windows extend an additional story up to the high ceiling of the Solarium. Directly above the doors, a set of three windows is comprised of a single central window with forty-two lites (seven horizontal by six vertical) flanked by two tall narrow windows with twelve lites each (two horizontal by six vertical). Above this triple set of windows is an additional set of three windows, with the central window comprised of twenty-one lites (seven horizontal by three vertical), and each side window containing six lites. The windows above the doorways are wood-framed and are stained dark brown on the interior. The wood framing between the doorways and sidelights also contains decorative carving in geometric designs along the upper corners.

The Tudor Lounge has two interior doorways that lead into the Colonial Room and the Tresidder Room, as well as two open balconies that overlook the Solarium. The doorways leading to the Colonial Room on the east wall and the Tresidder Room on the west wall are both paired, glazed doors with twelve divided lites and wood frames painted dark brown. These doors also have wide plaster surrounds that are painted dark brown. The open balconies that overlook the Solarium from the Tudor Lounge have wooden balustrades that are carved in a geometric design and stained dark brown. While the east balcony is open to guests, the west balcony is currently closed off with heavy curtains and is used as a storage area for chairs and banquet supplies.

In addition to the interior doorways that connect to the Tudor Lounge, the Colonial and Tresidder Rooms also each have two exterior doorways that open onto balconies. In the Colonial Room, these doorways face east and south; in the Tresidder Room, these doorways face west and south. Each of these doorways consists of a pair of glazed doors with sidelights and transom windows. Each door has twelve divided lites and a brown painted wood frame. A pair of sidelights flanks the pair of doors, and is also wood-framed with eight divided lites. Above the doorway is a transom window in three sections. The center section has six divided lites and each side section has two divided lites.
Dining Wing

The doorway that connects to the Dining Room from the Elevator Lobby is comprised of a pair of wide wood vertical plank doors that are painted brown. These doors are typically propped open during the Dining Room’s operating hours so that the interior space of the Dining Room is partially visible from the Elevator Lobby. The Dining Room has twelve exterior doors along the glazed southwest wall. Each door flanks a massive picture window and is set between sugar pine log columns. The doors are glazed with a single lite comprising the top two-thirds of the door and a wood panel with three vertical sections comprising the bottom one-third. The doors are wood-framed and are painted brown.

Along the vestibule that leads from the Elevator Lobby into the Dining Room, there are three interior doors that lead to storage spaces and into the Food and Beverage Manager’s office. All of these doors are vertical wood plank doors that are painted dark brown.

Kitchen Wing

The Kitchen and surrounding auxiliary spaces have a variety of types of doors. Most of these are not original, with the exception of the Loading Dock and Bakery doors. The doors that lead to the Loading Dock are the original pair of vertical wood plank doors with wire glass lites. The Bakery door is a wood stile and rail door with metal cladding and a single lite. The exterior doors in the Dishwashing Room are non-historic metal doors. The door to the Chef’s office is a wood stile and rail door with a single glazed lite. The doors to the food storage area and the Employee Dining Room are wood doors with galvanized steel panels and vision lites.

North Mezzanine Spaces

The North Mezzanine Lounge (originally the Women’s Lounge) has two open balconies that overlook the Great Lounge. The top of each balcony is defined by a plaster ceiling beam that is corbelled at each end and painted brown. Each balcony also has a dark stained wood balustrade that is carved in a geometric design. Above the balustrade is an additional railing that was added at an unknown date to raise the height for safety purposes.

The doors that lead to the Women’s Restroom, Diggins Suite, Business Center, and Accessible Unisex Restroom from the North Mezzanine Lounge are all historic wood stile and rail doors with two decoratively carved panels that emphasize zigzag lines around the corners. These doors are painted black.
Guest Rooms

Most of the guest room doors throughout the hotel are original. The doors are single panel, solid wood doors that are currently painted dark brown and ivory. Historically, these doors were stained dark brown and varnished. Wood transoms located above each guest room door are also painted dark brown and ivory. Each transom has a unique stencil design painted on it in a geometric motif. The transom stencils are original; however, some of the stencils have been repainted throughout the hotel’s history. Originally, the transoms were operable; however, they were permanently closed in 1981 for safety purposes and fire prevention measures.261

Most of the guest room bathroom doors are also original. Each bathroom door is a single panel, solid wood door with a metal vent near the bottom of the door. These doors are currently painted in a light ivory color. Closet doors in guest rooms are paired, single panel, solid wood doors. The closet doors are currently painted ivory; however, they were historically stained dark brown and varnished.

Some guest rooms have private or shared terraces or balconies that are accessed directly from the room. Terraces are located adjacent to Guest Rooms 230, 232, 234, 444, 450, 502, and 507. The terrace doorways are comprised of paired wooden Dutch doors with a single glazed lite comprising the top two-thirds of each door and a single wood panel comprising the bottom one-third. The upper portion of each door can be opened separately from the bottom portion. One of the terrace doorways on the fourth floor is configured slightly differently, as the glazed portion of each door has six lites instead of a single lite. All of the terrace doorways are currently painted ivory on the interior. Balconies are located adjacent to Rooms 104, 105, 417, 426, 430, 434, and 438. The balcony doorways are comprised of paired French doors that are wood-framed and glazed with a single lite. The balcony doors are also currently painted ivory on the interior.

First Through Fifth Floor Hallways and Elevator Lobbies

The first floor Elevator Lobby contains a doorway that separates the public space of the North Mezzanine Lounge from the guest room hallway. This doorway consists of a pair of vertical wood plank doors that are painted black. The upper floors do not have doors separating the elevator lobbies from the hallways.

Storage Areas and Linen Closets

The closets and storage areas accessed from the hallways throughout the hotel have the same type of historic single panel wood doors that are found in the guest rooms. These doors are painted dark brown and ivory on the exterior, matching

the guest room doors; however, the interiors of many of these doors are unpainted, revealing the original stained and varnished finish of the doors.

Elevator Penthouse

The Elevator Penthouse is accessed via a hinged wooden panel in the floor, which is typically secured with a padlock. An additional wooden panel in the wall of the room provides passage to an exterior terrace where satellite equipment is located. This panel is comprised of horizontal wood paneling that is painted white on the interior.

Basement

Doors in the basement are typically metal clad wood doors. Most of these are currently painted dark green. The door that leads from the Boiler Room into a storage hallway is a wood stile and rail door. The entry door from the loading dock is a hollow metal door with a single lite.

Maintenance Shops

The maintenance shops contain a variety of doors, including single wood doors, sliding vertical wood plank doors, and open latticework doors. These doors are either unpainted or are painted dark brown.

b. Windows

The fenestration pattern of the Ahwahnee Hotel is a distinctive character-defining feature of the hotel’s interior spaces, particularly in the Great Lounge, Dining Room, and Solarium, where the double-story walls are comprised nearly entirely of windows. The orientation and design of the building were planned with a primary purpose of providing optimal views of Half Dome, Yosemite Falls, and Glacier Point; thus, the massive picture windows were designed as frames for these views. While the windows in the hotel’s public spaces are generally large and prominent, most guest rooms have a single, standard-sized window.

Registration Wing

All of the glazing in the Registration Lobby is incorporated into the doorways and doors; additional windows on the upper floors are described in the Guest Rooms section.

Lounge Wing

The Great Lounge contains the most distinctive windows in the hotel, as they are not only massive, but are characterized by colorful geometric stained-glass
designs in the upper sections. The long east and west walls of the rectangular room are lined by floor-to-ceiling windows. Each of these two walls contains five windows that are each topped by a unique stained glass panel designed by Jeannette Dyer Spencer. The colorful, geometric stained glass designs correspond with the hand-painted stencils on the Lounge’s massive ceiling beams, and are a significant component of the hotel’s interior design scheme, which was inspired by California Indian Basket designs. Each of the ten window sections in the Great Lounge consists of three levels of fixed windows set in brown painted wood frames. On the lower level, a central window with twenty-one lites (seven horizontal by three vertical) is flanked by a pair of narrow side windows with six lites each. Above these three windows, the middle level of windows consists of a larger central window with forty-two lites (seven horizontal by six vertical) that is flanked by a pair of narrow side windows with twelve lites each. The top tier of windows is comprised of a central stained glass window with two narrow side windows of six lites each. The stained glass windows display intricate, symmetrical designs created from tiny segments of red, gold, green, blue, orange, and turquoise colored glass. The Great Lounge windows extend to a height of approximately twenty feet, and are eleven feet wide.

The California Room (Winter Club Room) and the Writing Room (Mural Room) each have one large set of fixed windows in addition to the glazed sections that surround the doorways. These sets of windows are nearly identical in appearance; however, in the California Room, the windows face east, and in the Mural Room, the windows face west. The windows are configured as a set of three, with a central window comprised of thirty lites (five horizontal by six vertical) flanked by two narrow side windows of twelve lites each. These windows have wood frames that are painted dark brown. The central window is separated from the two side windows by a pair of chamfered engaged concrete posts. The posts are painted the same dark brown as the window frames.

The Solarium, which comprises the south end of the Lounge wing, has five exterior walls that form a partial octagon shape, maximizing views in multiple directions. Each of these walls is comprised nearly entirely of windows, with two walls containing doorways and three walls containing massive picture windows. The three end walls each have two levels of windows. The lower level consists of a large, single, fixed picture window measuring approximately twelve feet high by five feet wide. This window is flanked by two narrow side windows of twenty-seven lites each. Above this set of windows is an upper window with thirty-nine lites (thirteen horizontal by three vertical). The windows are all set in wood frames that are stained dark brown.

**Dining Wing**

The Dining Room walls are also comprised principally of windows. Along the southwest wall of the room, six bays are delineated by log columns. Each of these
six bays is comprised of six windows and two doors. In the center of each bay is a large, fixed picture window that measures approximately twelve feet high by five feet wide. This picture window is flanked by two doors on the lower half and two narrow side windows on the upper half. Each side window has eighteen lites (three horizontal by six vertical). Above this tier of windows is an upper tier of three windows consisting of a central window with fifteen lites (five horizontal by three vertical), flanked by two narrow side windows with nine lites each. The wood frames of each of the windows are painted brown on the interior.

At the northwest end of the Dining Wing is a large projecting bay with windows that face southwest, northwest, and northeast. The southwest- and northeast-facing windows are nearly identical to the windows that line the southwest wall; however, instead of two doors flanking the lower half of the picture window, there are two narrow side windows with nine lites each. On the northwest end of the bay, the windows are configured in the same formation as on the sides of the bay, but have an additional set of three windows at the top. The set of windows at the end of the Dining Room is approximately twenty-eight feet in height, and provides a striking appearance on both the interior and the exterior of the room. The central window in the top tier of windows is pyramid-shaped, following the lines of the gable roof above. This window has thirty-two lites (eight horizontal by four vertical). Flanking the central window are two side windows with seven lites each. The set of windows at the end of the Dining Room is flanked by two massive granite piers that form the corners of the bay.

**Kitchen Wing**

The Kitchen Wing still contains the original wood-framed hopper windows that run along the tops of the west, north, and east walls. These windows each have two divided lites and are arranged in a horizontal orientation. The glazing is wired safety glass, and the wood frames are painted white on the interior.

**Guest Rooms**

The guest room windows are aluminum sliding windows with four lites each. The aluminum frames are currently painted black. These aluminum windows were installed during the hotel’s major restoration project from 1977-1980. The original guest room windows were wooden casement windows.

The guest rooms on the Sixth Floor have distinctive windows that differ from those in the other guest rooms. Room 603 (Sun Porch) has historic wood-framed accordion windows along the east and south walls. Each of the three sets of accordion windows has four tall, narrow windows with four lites each. The wood frames are painted white on the interior, and all of the windows are currently operable. Historic leaded glass windows are also extant along the west wall of Rooms 604 and 605, the south and west walls of Room 602 (Library), and the
south and east walls of Room 607. These wood-framed casement windows are arranged in sets of three or five, and have leaded glass sections designed in a chevron pattern. The wood frames of these windows are currently painted white on the interior; however, aluminum sliding windows have been added on the interior of the windows. The aluminum window frames are painted black.

**First Through Fifth Floor Hallways and Elevator Lobbies**

Although the hallways leading to guest rooms on the first through fifth floors do not have windows along their length, some hallways have windows at the ends of the wings. These windows are aluminum sliding windows. Like the guest room windows, these are not original windows, and were installed during the 1977-80 restoration project when all wood windows were replaced. The Elevator Lobbies do not contain windows.

**Elevator Penthouse**

The original wood-framed windows along the north wall of the Elevator Penthouse have been covered with wood wall paneling on the interior. The four casement windows are still extant on the exterior; however, they are not visible from the interior of the room.

**Maintenance Shops**

The Maintenance Shops do not have windows.

6. **Decorative Features and Trim**

**Hand-painted Stenciling**

One of the most distinctive decorative features of the Ahwahnee’s interior is the geometric stenciling that was hand-painted on many of the walls, ceiling beams, columns, transoms, and doorways throughout the hotel. Although some of the stencils have been painted over or repainted through the hotel’s history, several original stencils are still visible throughout the hotel’s public spaces and guest rooms. The stencils were designed by Jeannette Dyer Spencer, the architect and interior designer who also created the stained glass windows in the Great Lounge and painted the Basket Mural in the Elevator Lobby. The stencil designs comprised an important component of the original interior design scheme developed by Phyllis Ackerman and Arthur Upham Pope, which was inspired by geometric designs from California Indian baskets. The intricacy and small size of the stencils provided a contrast against the massive public spaces in the hotel, and the presence of the stencils throughout the building served as a unifying element, providing consistency of the Native American theme amid the eclectic furnishings. Spencer designed stencils in her own interpretation of Native American motifs, utilizing geometric shapes, bright colors,
and heavy black lines. These stencils were hand-painted along the tops of the walls in the Registration Lobby, Great Lounge, hallways, and guest rooms. In addition, both the Registration Lobby and the Great Lounge had stencils painted at the tops of columns. The Great Lounge ceiling beams and some of the hallway ceiling beams also contained painted stencils. The elevator doorways on each floor were surrounded by stencils, and the ground floor elevator doors also had a unique stencil design painted directly on the doors. Transoms above the Guest Room doors also had geometric designs painted on them.

While many of the original hand-painted stencils are still in place throughout the building, several alterations and modifications occurred throughout the hotel’s history. The most extensive alterations to the stencils occurred after the Navy leased the hotel from 1943-1945. In 1946, due to heavy wear on the wall surfaces, the hotel underwent extensive repainting throughout, and some stencils were repainted or painted over at this time. One of the most noticeable alterations was the over-painting of the eighteen original square designs painted on both sides of the three massive crossbeams in the Great Lounge. Additionally, stencils painted around adjoining doorways on the interior walls of some guest rooms were also painted over at this time. There are no longer any of these types of stencils still in existence in the hotel. However, despite the repainting that occurred throughout the years, many of the stencils along the tops of the walls were able to be salvaged because of their location. Stencils on guest room transoms were also able to be painted around without over-painting; thus many of the original transom stencils also still remain intact. Although several modifications have occurred throughout the Ahwahnee’s history, the design and placement of the remaining stencils still provides a visually prominent component of the hotel’s interior design scheme, maintaining a similar effect as the original stencils.

Fireplaces

The Ahwahnee Hotel main building has eleven fireplaces—eight within the hotel’s public spaces and three in private guest rooms. The public fireplaces are located in the Elevator Lobby, Great Lounge, Under Lounge, Writing Room, California Room, Tudor Lounge, Colonial Room, and Tresidder Room. Guest Room fireplaces are located in Rooms 232 and 332 (Parlor Suites), as well as in Room 602 (Library). All of the fireplaces are original; however, some of the finishes have been modified. Gilbert Stanley Underwood’s original drawings indicate that several of the fireplaces, including those in the Tudor Lounge, Parlor Suites, and Sixth Floor, were initially intended to be constructed of massive granite and jasper stones in a rustic style; however, the designs for these fireplaces were modified before they were constructed, and were ultimately built of cast stone or brick.

The fireplace at the center of the south wall of the Elevator Lobby was an important component of the hotel’s original design and circulation pattern. The Elevator Lobby forms the base of the Central Core of the building, and is the connecting point
between the Registration Lobby, Dining Room, and Great Lounge, as well as the waiting area for the elevator to reach the guest rooms. The fireplace is the central focal point of the Elevator Lobby, and is also part of the original designed view from the hotel entrance. The glow emitted by the fireplace was meant to be visible to guests entering the hotel, emphasizing the Ahwahnee’s ambiance as that of a “country home,” and also demonstrating the centrality of the hearth, which was a tenet of the American Arts & Crafts Movement. The Elevator Lobby fireplace has a polished jasper stone masonry surround with red mortar, and a firebox of light tan colored brick. The hearth is scored cast stone, and the rough-cut wood mantel is painted dark brown. The jasper masonry of the fireplace also corresponds with the jasper in the stairway on the north side of the Elevator Lobby.

On the opposite side of the wall from the Elevator Lobby fireplace, at the north end of the Great Lounge, a massive cast stone fireplace sits at the center of the wall between the two open doorways. The surround and hearth are cast stone, while the firebox is constructed from tan brick in a chevron pattern. The fireplaces in both the Great Lounge and the Under Lounge have inglenooks with built-in cast stone benches on both sides, also exhibiting the influence of the Arts & Crafts Movement. The wood mantel above the fireplace is painted dark brown.

At the south end of the Great Lounge, the fireplace in the Under Lounge mirrors the fireplace at the north end of the Great Lounge, and is constructed in the same formation with the same materials.

The Writing Room has a unique fireplace that is located in the northeast corner of the room. Comprised of a tan brick firebox and quarter-circle-shaped cast stone hearth, the fireplace has a conical hammered copper hood that extends up to the ceiling.

The California Room has a small fireplace in the northwest corner of the room. The fireplace has a cast stone surround and hearth, brick firebox, and a rough-cut wood mantel that is painted dark brown.

The fireplace in the Tudor Lounge is located at the center of the south wall, and is directly above the Under Lounge fireplace. The Tudor Lounge fireplace has a cast stone surround that is currently painted red-orange with geometric stencil designs painted in green, black, and yellow. It is unknown whether the stencil designs are original; however the fireplace has been repainted through the years, so the paint is not original. The fireplace has a brick firebox and a polished dark gray granite hearth. The fireplace historically had a mantel shelf; however this was removed at an unknown date.

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262 Don Tresidder, “Memorandum on the Ahwahnee Development,” November 12, 1927, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 7, Subseries 4.2, Box 1, Folder 187.
The Colonial Room has a brick fireplace located at the northwest corner of the room. The fireplace has a brick firebox and surround, a wood mantel, and a quarry tile hearth. The brick surround is currently painted orange with a band of geometric stencils painted along the top in shades of tan, black, orange, and yellow; however the painting is not original. Originally, the brick was unpainted.

The Tresidder Room has a fireplace at the northeast corner of the room. The fireplace has a cast stone surround, mantel, and hearth. The surround is currently painted dark red with stencils painted on it in green, yellow, and black. The mantel is currently painted brown. The painted finishes are not original.

Rooms 232 and 332 (Parlor Suites) both have fireplaces along the north wall. In Room 232 (Presidential Parlor Suite), the fireplace is red brick with painted wood trim. The firebox, surround, and hearth are constructed from brick, and are surrounded by a wide wood surround and mantel with decorative molding. The surround, mantel, and molding are currently painted white. The fireplace has two wrought iron doors with metal screens and swirl designs at the corners. In Room 332, the fireplace is constructed from brick laid in a chevron pattern, and has a brick hearth with wood edging. This fireplace also has wrought iron screen doors.

Room 602 (Library) has a cast stone fireplace at the east end of the north wall. The fireplace has a gray cast stone surround and hearth, and a brick firebox. Originally, this fireplace was at the center of the north wall of the large, open roof garden dance floor that comprised the majority of the sixth floor space.

Registration Desk and Cashiers’ Counter

The original Registration Desk and Cashiers’ Counter are still in their original locations in the Registration Lobby. The Registration Desk is still used for its original purpose; however, the Cashiers’ Counter is no longer in use. The Registration Desk is located at the northwest corner of the Registration Lobby. The Desk is constructed from wood paneling with a pattern of concentric rectangles, and is stained dark brown. The Cashiers’ Counter is located along the north side of the hallway that leads from the Registration Lobby to the Elevator Lobby. This counter is constructed from the same stained wood paneling as the Registration Desk; however, the Cashiers’ Counter also has seven tall, decorative wood panels along the top of the desk. These panels functioned as a screen when the counter was used for transactions. The panels are stained dark brown, and have geometric patterns of concentric squares and diamond shapes painted on them in shades of red, green, and blue. The wooden posts that stand between each panel are decoratively carved with diamond shapes and a curled scroll design at the top of each post. Originally, two of the panel sections were open, and had decorative wrought iron grilles in these spaces. The grilles were designed by Ernest Born, and had a swirling flower and leaf design.264 These grilles

are today used as window decoration in two of the doors that lead to the managers’ offices behind the Registration Desk.

**Drinking Fountain and Recessed Bench**

A recessed bench and drinking fountain are located along the south side of the hallway that leads from the Registration Lobby to the Elevator Lobby. These two design features are original to the building, and are unique yet subtle elements that demonstrate the influence of the Arts & Crafts Movement on the Ahwahnee’s interior design. Built-in seating and recessed “nooks” were a characteristic component of Arts & Crafts interiors, and were particularly prevalent in bungalows. The recessed bench seat in the entrance hallway is constructed from dark brown stained wood and has a wide, dark brown stained wood surround. The bench is approximately five feet wide. The drinking fountain is located in a recessed space that is approximately three feet wide, with a hexagon-shaped edge along the top. This recessed space is backed by a jasper masonry wall. The fountain is comprised of a jasper bowl with ceramic lining and a metal spout. The bowl sits on a decoratively carved wooden platform that extends from the jasper wall behind the fountain. This platform is cut in a stairopstep pattern, and has a square geometric design carved into the side.

**Solarium Fountain**

The Solarium has a jasper masonry fountain at the center of the north wall. The fountain is an important part of the Solarium’s function as a sun room, as it has historically housed a variety of plants that benefit from the room’s five glazed south-facing walls. The fountain is constructed from native jasper with red mortar. The architect’s initial specifications were that jasper be obtained from Jasper Station quarry, a site along the Yosemite Valley Railroad approximately fifty miles from the Ahwahnee site. The fountain projects from the wall in a half-octagon shape, mimicking the shape of the room. The inset wall behind the fountain is also constructed from jasper masonry with red mortar. In the center of the fountain, a jasper boulder stands, with water running from its top. Living plants are maintained in the fountain, contributing to the room’s function as a linking space between indoor and outdoor environments. The stone and running water provide a backdrop for the framed views of Yosemite’s waterfalls that visitors can view through the hotel windows.

**Tyrolean Cabinets**

Although guest rooms in the hotel did not generally contain extravagant furnishings and finishes, subtle design details in the guest rooms contributed to the Ahwahnee’s interior artistry. Guest rooms had small, rectangular, built-in cabinets with either

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265 Gilbert Stanley Underwood, “Preliminary Specifications for a Hotel to be Built in Yosemite National Park, California,” 1925, Section 10, p. 14, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 10, Box 1, Folder 679.
single or double door openings and cedar drawers. Interior designer Phyllis Ackerman referred to these cabinets as “Tyrolean Cabinets.” Originally, these cabinets had dark stained wood finishes and had geometric stencils painted both on the cabinet doors and on walls surrounding the cabinets. Today, none of the original finishes remain, as some cabinets have been repainted, and some have been replaced or removed.

7. Hardware

The Ahwahnee Hotel retains some of its original hardware. Although many of the windows and doors have been updated with new hardware to improve accessibility or prevent damage from heavy use, several of the original brass door handles, knobs, and latches are extant throughout the hotel. While the finishes and décor in the Ahwahnee’s public spaces are embellished with artistic details, the hardware is generally more utilitarian, as it was intended to withstand heavy use from guest accommodation. In the public spaces on the ground floor, most of the paired, glazed entry doors have brass push bars on the interiors and brass handle sets on the exterior. Some doors also have brass push plates. This hardware is not original to the building. On the upper floors, the Dutch doors that lead from guest rooms onto private terraces retain their historic latching mechanism with large cabin door hooks; however, it is unknown whether the hooks are original. On the interior of the building, many of the doors leading to guest rooms and storage areas retain their original brass knobs; however, lever handles have been installed on public restroom doors and accessible guest room doors in order to accommodate guests with disabilities. In addition to door hardware, some original window hardware also remains in the hotel. Since all guest room windows were replaced during the 1979-80 restoration project, no original window hardware remains in the standard guest rooms. However, in the Sixth Floor suites, both the original leaded glass windows and the historic accordion windows still retain their historic hardware. The accordion windows in Guest Room 603 (Sun Porch) have a unique latching mechanism comprised of a brass handle and post that attaches at both the ceiling and the floor beneath the windows. The leaded glass windows in rooms 602, 604, 605, and 607 also retain their original brass handle latches; however, new windows have been installed to the interior of the leaded glass windows, so the original windows are no longer operable.

8. Mechanical Equipment

a. Heating, Air Conditioning, Ventilation

The hotel is heated by hot water and steam heat. Two oil-fired boilers in the basement boiler room generate steam, which feeds heat exchangers for hot water heat and also feeds radiators in some of the public rooms. Hot water for space heating is distributed to guest rooms, the Dining Room, Gift Shop, Sweet Shop, and women’s restroom. The hot water heating system in the hotel was installed

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266 Phyllis Ackerman, “Notes on the Ahwahnee Decorations,” 1927, Yosemite Research Library.
circa 1990. The Great Lounge, Solarium, Registration Lobby, and other public spaces are heated with steam heat from the original radiators. Fireplaces throughout the public spaces also generate heat in the winter months, but are not utilized as primary heating units. The Ahwahnee Bar has a forced-air heating system located in the crawl space. Steam from the boilers is also piped to the Employee Dormitory, where a forced-air heating system is ducted to each of the rooms.267

Air conditioning in the hotel is generated through a chilled water system that was also installed in approximately 1990. Fan coils located in ceiling and attic spaces above guest rooms and public spaces provide conditioning to the rooms. The Employee Dormitory does not have central air conditioning, but has several through-the-wall air conditioners.268

Exhaust fans in the guest bathrooms vent air into the plumbing chase, which is in turn vented outside of the building via exhaust fans located in the third and fifth floor attic spaces.

In the Kitchen area, a recently-updated HVAC system includes new kitchen hoods, ductwork, exhaust fans, air-handling system, and an LPG-fired boiler.269

b. Lighting

The Ahwahnee has a variety of different types of lighting fixtures, many of which are original. The original German Gothic-style wrought iron light fixtures were a distinctive and prominent component of the hotel’s interior décor scheme, and are still important character-defining features of the Ahwahnee’s interior spaces. These fixtures were designed by Milton Roller of San Francisco’s Phoenix Day Lighting Company, and consisted of wrought iron chandeliers, wall sconces, and floor lamps. The light fixtures exhibit hand-crafted finishes that were characteristic of the Arts & Crafts Movement, and also incorporate lines and shapes that resemble Native American motifs, corresponding with the hotel’s overall décor scheme.

The most substantial light fixtures in the hotel are the massive chandeliers in the Registration and Elevator Lobbies, Great Lounge, Under Lounge, Solarium, and Dining Room. These wrought iron fixtures exhibit geometric shapes and zigzag angles, and hold tall candlestick light bulbs. The chandeliers in both the Registration Lobby and the Elevator Lobby are circular fixtures with either six or eight lights. A symmetrical snowflake design comprises the base, and a zigzag pattern surrounds the edges. In the Registration Lobby, nine of the ten original eight-light fixtures remain, and all three of the original six-light fixtures remain.

268 Ibid.
269 Ibid.
In the Elevator Lobby, all seven of the original eight-light fixtures are still in place.\(^{270}\)

In the Great Lounge, all five original chandeliers remain in their historic locations, forming a line at the center along the length of the room. Three of the chandeliers are circular, but are much more massive than those in the Registration Lobby. These chandeliers are twenty-light fixtures with wrought iron star-shaped pendants that extend downward at the base. The two chandeliers at each end are oblong octagon-shaped fixtures that also have twenty lights each. Each of these two chandeliers also has a wrought iron pendant extending downward from the base in the shape of a crown.

The three original eight-light chandeliers remain in the Under Lounge. Each of these is open at the base, with a modified zigzag line along the top edge.

The Solarium has one large, unique chandelier in the center of the room. This fixture is quatrefoil-shaped and has twenty lights. A wrought iron design comprised of thin metal strips and zigzag shapes extends upward from the top of the chandelier, and a spherical pendant extends downward from the bottom. In each of the two open entryways that link the Under Lounge to the Solarium is a smaller quatrefoil-shaped chandelier with four lights and a small leaf-shaped pendant at the base. The stairway that leads from the Solarium to the Tudor Lounge also has a unique wrought iron hanging lantern, which is cone-shaped with the tapering end toward the bottom. This fixture also contains zigzag-edged designs, and has a yellow mica shade.

The Dining Room retains all fourteen of its original triangle-shaped chandeliers. These fixtures, which are arranged in two rows along the length of the room, each have eighteen lights held in zigzag-edged cups. The chandeliers have curved wrought iron strips that extend downward from each corner of the base and connect with a spiral-shaped pendant in the center.

Both Parlor Suites (Guest Rooms 232 and 332) retain their original wrought iron chandeliers. Each of these fixtures contains eight lights in a circular formation and has decorative stamping in a random pattern on the bottom of the fixture.

In addition to the distinctive chandeliers, several other original wrought iron fixtures are still in use throughout the hotel. These include wall sconces that hold tall candlestick light bulbs, as well as floor and table lamps. The wrought iron light fixtures have geometric angles and zigzag edges, corresponding with the painted stencil designs and the hotel’s Native American décor motif. These fixtures also exhibit a heavy, handcrafted appearance that was characteristic of Arts & Crafts finishes.

\(^{270}\) A detailed assessment of the Ahwahnee’s historic light fixtures can be found in the Ahwahnee Historic Furnishings Report, 2011.
While wrought iron light fixtures are found throughout the hotel, some rooms have distinctive types of lighting. In the French Gothic-themed Writing Room, the original brass chandelier still hangs at the center of the room. This fixture has a spherical base and eight candlestick lights. Similar brass chandeliers also hang in the Tudor Lounge, Colonial Room, Tresidder Room, and Sixth Floor Library. These rooms also contain brass wall sconces. The California Room also retains its original chandelier, which consists of four metal miners’ lanterns with hurricane-shaped smoked glass chimneys. These four lanterns are held together in a wrought iron hanging fixture.

When the hotel was initially furnished, Persian vases and Mexican Terra Cotta jars were also fashioned into table lamps, contributing to the eclectic décor scheme. However, none of these lamps are still in use in the hotel.

Lights in guest rooms and hallways are generally replacement fixtures, and consist of an assortment of contemporary glass ceiling fixtures and table lamps. Originally, lights in the guest rooms were simple, open wrought iron hanging fixtures that typically had one candlestick light bulb at the center.

c. Plumbing

Domestic water is fed from a six-inch line that runs north-south through the crawl space of the hotel building. This line connects to a four-inch loop that surrounds the Ahwahnee and also feeds the cottage area. The water passes through a dual pressure-reducing station, then is distributed into multiple plumbing chases in the basement and crawl space areas. The chases connect to each of the floors of the hotel. Hot water is generated in two steam-fired heat exchangers in 1500-gallon storage tanks. The piping for domestic hot and cold water was replaced circa 1990. Plumbing fixtures and trim throughout the hotel have been replaced on a regular basis. Guest rooms typically have contemporary chrome faucets and white ceramic sink basins, bathtubs, and toilets.

9. Original Furnishings

The hotel’s original furnishings comprised an integral part of the eclectic interior design scheme developed by Ackerman and Pope. At the time of the Ahwahnee’s initial opening, a sizeable collection of California Indian baskets was displayed throughout the hotel alongside the geometric interior finishes that were inspired by the basket designs. In addition, furnishings and fixtures from throughout the world accompanied the hotel’s Native American-inspired motifs. Ackerman and Pope’s background in Persian art was evident in their choice to include khillim and kalamkar rugs from the Middle East; however, these were combined with alpujarra rugs from Spain, as well as textiles and tapestries from Turkey, Greece, Italy, Persia, and Guatemala, which not only adorned the floors throughout the hotel, but also served as

wall hangings and table runners. Additional furnishings that contributed to the eclectic furniture collection included Mexican terra cotta lamps, Japanese vases, French Gothic candle stands, sixteenth-century English oak tables, and Flemish andirons. The combination of California Indian basketry designs and international furnishings was accompanied by Colonial American-inspired furniture, such as the Sleepy Hollow and Beacon chairs in the Great Lounge.

Furnishings throughout the hotel have been updated, replaced, and refinished throughout the hotel’s existence. In addition, when the Ahwahnee was leased to the Navy for use as a Special Hospital from 1943-1945, many of the hotel’s furnishings were placed in storage, where some items sustained damages in the process of packing and transport. A number of furnishings were also lost in a train accident that occurred as items were being hauled to storage in 1943. Despite the loss of some furnishings during the Navy era, the leasing of the hotel provided the impetus for the YP&C Co. to undertake a comprehensive inventory of all of the hotel’s furnishings. This 1943 inventory has proved to be an invaluable source for researching and documenting the Ahwahnee’s historic furnishings, and has informed the current inventory system. Numerous examples of the Ahwahnee’s original furnishings are still in use in the hotel today, including chairs, tables, desks, basketry, and textiles.

Historic furnishings at the Ahwahnee Hotel are managed as “Reserved Property,” pursuant to the Concession Contract maintained between the NPS and the current concessioner, DNC. While fixtures and furnishings that are attached to the hotel, such as light fixtures, are owned by the NPS, removable furnishings are the property of the concessioner. The Concession Contract defines Reserved Property as follows:

> Certain personal property owned by the concessioner is intrinsic to the historic and cultural values of the area and related concession operations. Some items are, in themselves, valuable, artistic, historic or cultural artifacts. For the purposes of this contract, this property shall be known as Reserved Property. The concessioner shall retain ownership of such property and, to the greatest extent possible, maintain such property in service… and available to the public.

The concessioner maintains a Reserved Property List of historic furnishings and conducts quarterly inventories, which are reported to the NPS Concessions Management Office. The list of Reserved Property was initially compiled in 1993, and was updated in 1997 and in 2008. Items on this list are categorized as furniture, baskets, textiles, or art. The current collection of Reserved Property includes more than one hundred items, several of which are still in use throughout the hotel.

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272 Phyllis Ackerman, “Notes on the Ahwahnee Decorations,” 1927, Yosemite Research Library.
273 Concession Contract CC-YOSE004-93, Hotel Services, Section 18(a) (1), 27.
Textiles

A significant element of Ackerman and Pope’s interior design plan for the Ahwahnee was the inclusion of a diverse array of rugs and tapestries from the Middle East, Europe, Central America, and the United States. A promotional description from the time of the Ahwahnee’s opening in 1927 described the textile assortment as:

part of an eclectic but harmonious scheme of things that includes gay Alpujarra rugs from the dower-chests of the Basque peasants of the Pyrenees, Khilim rugs and printed wall hangings rich in color from distant Persian provinces, hand-woven bedspreads and table-covers from our own mountains of Kentucky and North Carolina… and textiles from Scandinavia…

Originally, the hand-woven Middle Eastern rugs were used as floor coverings; thus, they underwent significant wear over time. While many of the original rugs and wall hangings have been lost throughout the decades, a wide selection of pieces is still in the possession of the hotel. However, these rugs are no longer used as floor coverings, but are hung on walls and framed in glass cases for display in the hotel’s public rooms. The repurposing of the Ahwahnee’s original rugs was part of the 1979 interior restoration effort led by Marian Vantress, which called for the “fine old killim[sic] rugs [to be] brought out of closets, then cleaned, repaired and installed permanently on the walls.” Small fragments of rugs that were torn or deteriorated were salvaged and placed into glass display frames throughout the hotel. Today, several of these rugs and tapestries are still exhibited in the Ahwahnee, and represent the only collection created by Pope and Ackerman that is on display in the United States.

Middle Eastern textiles are currently on exhibit in all of the Ahwahnee’s public rooms, as well as throughout the elevator lobbies and hallways on each floor. Some framed fragments are also on display in individual guest rooms. Khilim rugs that are currently on display in the Ahwahnee include Kurdish, Aydinli (Turkish), Konya (Turkish), Veramin (Iranian), Shahsavan (Iranian), Moroccan, Uzbek, Romanian, Kuba (Azerbaijani), Shirvan (Caucasian), Bakhtiari (Iranian), and Reyhanli (Turkish) khilims. In addition, printed Persian kalamkar tapestries are on display in the Great Lounge, and an Andalucían alpujarra rug hangs in the Under Lounge. A 1988 article in Oriental Rug Review described the existing assemblage of rugs in the Ahwahnee as “a comprehensive collection of the entire range of Middle Eastern flatweave techniques, including the uncommon Caucasian soumak in the second floor elevator lobby. Not only did they [Pope and Ackerman] select flatweave,
wool textiles, but printed cloth (kalamkars), embroidered hangings (Resht), and utilitarian trappings (Yomud tentband).”

An informational booklet based on Phyllis Ackerman’s original design notes was written by Jeannette Dyer Spencer and Dorothy Ellis in 1942, and published with the title The Ahwahnee, Yosemite. Several additional types of textiles were described in this booklet, including “fabrics from Italy, Greece, and Guatemala” in the public spaces, as well as “blankets from mountain weavers and the Rosemount looms in Virginia—dresser covers and rugs from the Crossnore school in Kentucky—and bath rugs from the Berkshires” in the guest rooms. Based on current inventories, none of these historic textiles still remain in the hotel. Since several of the unique textiles in the hotel were used as bedding or rugs, the wear and tear sustained in normal hotel operations would have likely prevented the preservation of these items.

Basketry

When the Ahwahnee opened in 1927, California Indian baskets not only served as the primary interior design inspiration, but also were displayed throughout the hotel. Although a number of baskets have been lost throughout the hotel’s history (some taken as souvenirs by hotel guests), a collection of baskets still adorns the hotel’s public spaces today. Originally, baskets were displayed on the stairway landings above the Elevator Lobby, atop the fireplace mantels in the Great Lounge and Under Lounge, and as accents throughout the hotel. Today, several baskets are still displayed on the fireplace mantels, and larger baskets are exhibited in glass display cases in the Great Lounge. While many of the California Indian baskets in the hotel are part of the original collection, others may have been acquired through the years to add to the collection.

Chairs

Historic chairs remain in several of the hotel’s public spaces. Originally, many of the upholstered chairs in the Ahwahnee were made with hand-woven textiles created by renowned California textile designers, Dorothy Wright Liebes and Maria Kipp. Although the chairs have been reupholstered and refinished throughout the decades, some of the original Sleepy Hollow chairs, High-backed loveseats, Provincial chairs, Colonial Wing chairs, and Windsor arm chairs are still in use in the Great Lounge, Writing Room, Tudor Lounge, Colonial Room, and Tresidder Room. In addition, ladderback chairs of multiple varieties were historically used throughout the Ahwahnee. The original triple-wide ladderback chairs with rattan seats are still in use in the Registration Lobby, and can also be found in several of the Elevator Lobbies on the upper floors of the hotel. The Dining Room inventory included more than five hundred ladderback chairs in 1943, and several of these chairs can be found in the

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279 Spencer and Ellis, The Ahwahnee, Yosemite, 13, 17.
Ahwahnee Hotel and Cottages today. Although these chairs were common furniture items when the hotel was originally built, the Dining Room chairs contained painted stencil designs on the wooden backs of the chairs, making them unique to the hotel. In addition to the original chairs in the hotel, one of the original wood-framed leather sofas from the California Room is also still in use.\(^{280}\)

**Tables**

Some of the historic tables that are still in use in the hotel include two massive English oak tables in the center of the Great Lounge, each of which has a geometric design painted on the side in shades of green, black, red, and white. Three hardwood, English-style trestle tables manufactured by L & J.G. Stickley Co. are still in use in the Writing Room and the North Mezzanine Lounge.\(^{281}\) Two original large display tables from the Gift Shop are currently used as conference tables in the Tudor Lounge. Several smaller historic tables also remain in the hotel, including two console tables in the Elevator Lobby, two circular bobbin-leg tables in the California Room, writing tables in the Writing Room, and several small circular and oval Provincial-style tables throughout the public rooms.

**Secretaries**

Several secretaries originally stood in the Great Lounge, Writing Room, California Room, and North Mezzanine Lounge. In her 1927 design notes, Phyllis Ackerman described the secretary style as a “seventeenth century American design.”\(^{282}\) However, geometric Native American-themed stencil designs were painted on the fronts of the doors of the secretaries, making them unique to the Ahwahnee. Six of these secretaries remain in the Great Lounge, and two remain in the Writing Room.

**Steinway Piano and Bench**

A Steinway grand piano has been a fixture in the Great Lounge since the hotel opened. In addition to contributing to the ambiance of the Lounge, the piano has also been associated with the Ahwahnee’s history as a hostelry that housed famous guests. In 1947, Judy Garland, Lucille Ball, and Desi Arnaz apparently entertained a crowd of guests with an impromptu performance at the piano.\(^{283}\) Renowned photographer Ansel Adams, a trained concert pianist, could often be found playing the piano in the Great Lounge during the many decades of his life spent in Yosemite. Today, the original Steinway grand piano remains in use in the Great Lounge, and an additional grand piano has also been added to the space at an unknown date. A third grand

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\(^{280}\) For more detailed information on the hotel’s historic furnishings, see the 2011 Ahwahnee Historic Furnishings Report, which contains room furnishings matrices, photographs, and condition assessments.


\(^{282}\) Phyllis Ackerman, Notes on The Ahwahnee Decorations, 4.

\(^{283}\) Sargent, The Ahwahnee, 48; Walklet, The Ahwahnee, 46.
piano is also currently located in the Dining Room. The concessioner maintains a schedule for piano performance in both the Great Lounge and Dining Room, and maintains agreements with multiple classical pianists for performing in the hotel throughout the week.

D. Site

1. Historic Landscape Design:

The Ahwahnee Hotel was constructed within a context in which both concessionaires and NPS officials worked to maintain a balance between preserving natural scenery and developing accommodations for visitor use in Yosemite Valley. Although the YP&C Co. owned the hotel, all landscape development on the property was subject to the approval of the NPS Landscape Division. NPS Chief Landscape Architects Daniel Hull (1920-27) and Thomas Vint (1927-61) both provided landscape design expertise regarding the Ahwahnee grounds, as did prominent landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. Just as the design of the hotel building emphasized a sense of “blending” with the surrounding environment, landscaping on the Ahwahnee grounds was also designed to harmonize with the natural landscape. However, although landscape design projects at the Ahwahnee Hotel were shaped by NPS policies and subject to NPS approval, the YP&C Co. still exerted extensive efforts to develop the Ahwahnee grounds in a manner that would provide recreation for elite vacationers and promote the Ahwahnee as a resort hotel. Landscape design projects included the installation of a twenty-five-acre wildflower garden of native Yosemite flowers (1928); bridle paths for horseback riding (1928); tennis courts (1929); a nine-hole golf course (1930); a reflecting pond designed as a replica of a high alpine lake (1934); an outdoor dancing pavilion (1940), and an outdoor swimming pool (1964).

In 1928, one year after the hotel opened, the YP&C Co. installed a twenty-five-acre wildflower garden containing more than one million flowers on the Ahwahnee grounds. Created by Carl Purdy, a “nationwide known wildflower expert” from Ukiah, California, the garden was comprised exclusively of native Yosemite plants. Purdy transplanted wildflowers from all elevations of Yosemite National Park to create the wildflower garden, which the YP&C Co. hailed as “the world’s greatest wild flower

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284 Robert Hunter, Jr., “Golf Data,” c. 1930, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 7, Subseries 4.2, Box 1, Folder 187; Hil Oehlmann, Letter to C.M. Merriam, May 6, 1940, Yosemite National Park Archives, Old Central Files Collection, Series 10, Subseries 1, Box 73, Folder 67; Doris Schmiedell, “A Transplanted Glacial Lake,” House and Garden, April 11, 1934; John Wosky, Letter to Thomas Vint, March 5, 1928, Yosemite National Park Archives, Old Central Files Collection, Series 7, Subseries 2, Box 28, Folder 58.

285 “Million Wild Flowers Will Grace Yosemite,” Vallejo Times Herald, September 12, 1928, Yosemite National Park Archives, Historic Newspaper Collection, Box 8; Meeting Minutes, Executive Committee of Yosemite Park & Curry Company, May 26, 1928, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 6, Box 2, Folder 534.
The planting of the wildflower garden at the Ahwahnee exemplified the ideals of the Picturesque Movement in American landscape design. Although the movement was first conceived in the eighteenth century, the ideals of the Picturesque Movement, as applied to the national parks in the 1920s and 1930s, involved “the interpretation of geographic features into landscape scenes…impl[y]ing] a broad cultural basis and aesthetic tradition for understanding places as pictures, and seeing land as landscape.” Landscaping was also intended to encourage “preservation through picturesque interpretation” by fostering an ethic within park visitors to preserve “natural” landscapes by interpreting them via designed spaces. The ideals and objectives of the Picturesque Movement were evident in landscape design throughout Yosemite Valley, where designed spaces were created to convey the idea that the natural world could be not only sublime—as exemplified in Yosemite’s towering cliffs—but also benevolent and gentle.

Just as the wildflower garden was intended to foster preservation via a designed landscape, the Picturesque ideal was also demonstrated in the 1934 installation of a reflecting pond that was a replica of a high alpine lake. Located adjacent to the hotel’s porte cochere, the pond was designed by Ted Spencer with input from YP&C Co. consulting landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. The reflecting pond was created to resemble a “High Sierra glacial lake,” with plants transported from Yosemite’s high elevations to surround the pond. In 1934, the reflecting pond was featured in an article in *House and Garden* magazine, where the author detailed Spencer’s design process:

Eldridge T. Spencer, San Francisco architect who had camped much in the Yosemite back country, planned this charming pool to mirror Yosemite Falls and the three thousand foot cliffs of Yosemite Valley and to simulate, in every minute detail, a glacial lake. An entire summer was spent wandering through the high meadows and climbing remote mountains in the back country, where load after load of rare plants and shrubs were gathered, with the sanction and co-operation of the National Park Service. Every blade of grass, every bit of moss, even the old log that lies half-submerged at the margin of the pool, came from Alpine levels, and all are planted as nearly as possible in conditions similar to those in which they were found.

In addition to conducting landscape design projects that celebrated the natural environment of Yosemite, the YP&C Co. also developed the Ahwahnee grounds to

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286 “1,000,000 Wild Flowers to be Set Out in 25-Acre Garden at Yosemite Park,” *San Diego Union*, September 9, 1928, Yosemite National Park Archives, Historic Newspaper Collection, Box 8.
288 Ibid., 25-27.
provide recreation opportunities for guests. In a 1930 report on the development of the Ahwahnee property, YP&C Co. architect Ted Spencer declared that “the greatest single need at the Ahwahnee, to create new business and increase the length of stay, is a golf course.”

Installing a golf course at the Ahwahnee Hotel was consistent with the YP&C Co.’s intent to operate the hotel as a resort, as numerous other resort hotels in California already had golf courses at the time. Plans for a golf course at the Ahwahnee were approved by NPS Landscape Architect Thomas Vint in April of 1930, and the nine-hole, 679-yard course was constructed during the summer of that same year.

Spencer also proposed additional development of the Ahwahnee grounds, including the construction of a garage, an outdoor theatre, and a casino; however, these additional proposals were never carried out by the YP&C Co. In addition to installing the golf course at the Ahwahnee, the YP&C Co. conducted several other landscape design projects intended to provide recreation opportunities for the hotel’s guests. These included the installation of bridle paths for horseback riding (1928), tennis courts (1929), an outdoor dancing pavilion (1940), and an outdoor swimming pool (1964).

Today, only some elements of the Ahwahnee’s historic landscape design projects are still intact. The wildflower preserve was not maintained during the hotel’s use as a Naval Hospital, and was partially removed when temporary buildings were installed on the hotel grounds. However, after 1946, the YP&C Co. reinstalled a ten-acre wildflower garden that was maintained by gardener and “native plant speciali[st],” Carl Stephens, for more than twenty years. In 1981, the YP&C Co. installed the “Dana and Esther Morgenson Wildflower Trail,” a walking path with interpretive signs along Royal Arch Creek and surrounding the reflecting pond.

While some native vegetation is still maintained in the reflecting pond area today, the majority of the Ahwahnee grounds consist of either lawn areas or meadow grasses. By 1980, the golf course was no longer in use, and the National Park Service issued a *General Management Plan* that mandated the discontinuation of golfing and tennis at the Ahwahnee. While the tennis courts are still intact, they are no longer maintained and are gated to prevent entry. The swimming pool and bridle path are still maintained for visitor use.

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294 John Wosky, Letter to Thomas Vint, March 5, 1928, Yosemite National Park Archives, Old Central Files Collection, Series 7, Subseries 2, Box 28, Folder 58; Hil Oehlmann, Letter to L.C. Merriam, May 6, 1940, Yosemite National Park Archives, Old Central Files Collection, Series 10, Subseries 1, Box 73, Folder 67.


296 Ibid.
2. Outbuildings

An Employee Dormitory is located to the northwest of the main hotel building, beyond the west end of the parking lot. This structure was constructed in 1943 by San Francisco architecture firm Blanchard and Maher for the Navy during the hotel’s use as a Naval Special Hospital. Originally purposed as a warehouse and support structure that housed kitchen staff, the building was known as the Cooks and Supply Building. In 1946-47, the building was converted into a “40-bed women employees’ dormitory” by YP&C Co. architect Ted Spencer. Today, the building is still used as housing for DNC employees. Although the Navy had installed several temporary buildings on the Ahwahnee property during the hotel’s use as a hospital, the Cooks and Supply Building is the only building from this era that remains on the site, as most of these buildings were either relocated or razed after 1946.

The Employee Dormitory is a rectangular, one-story building with a gable roof and horizontal wood siding that is currently painted gray-green. The windows are single-hung aluminum sash windows with wood sills. The original windows were double-hung, wood-framed windows. The exterior doors are hollow metal doors, while the interior doors are solid wood. On the interior, the walls and ceilings are plywood with vertical and horizontal battens, and are generally painted. Originally, the walls and ceilings were unpainted wood with exposed framing. When the building was converted into employee housing in 1946, wall partitions were added, creating a configuration of a double-loaded corridor with rooms on both sides. Floors are currently plywood with carpet in most of the rooms. Originally, the floors were wood.

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298. Meeting Minutes, Board of Directors of the Yosemite Park & Curry Company, February 22, 1947, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 6, Box 2, Folder 545; Hil Oehlmann, Letter to Seeley G. Mudd, M.D., November 7, 1946, Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 4, Subseries 3, Box 8, Folder 404.
PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Selected Architectural Drawings

The Ahwahnee Hotel original plans by Gilbert Stanley Underwood, 1925
Yosemite Research Library, RL 4397

The Ahwahnee Hotel “new plans” by Gilbert Stanley Underwood, c. 1926
Yosemite Research Library, RL 6788
Ahwahnee Grounds showing National Register and National Historic Landmark boundaries

From “The Ahwahnee: Cultural Landscape Report,” 2011

Created by AECOM for the National Park Service, Yosemite National Park
As-Built Drawings of North and South Elevations, 2010
Created by Hornberger & Worstell for the National Park Service
Yosemite National Park, Ahwahnee Comprehensive Rehabilitation Plan
As-Built Drawings of West and East Elevations, 2010
Created by Hornberger & Worstell for the National Park Service
Yosemite National Park, Ahwahnee Comprehensive Rehabilitation Plan
As-Built Drawing of Ground Floor Plan, 2010
Created by Hornberger & Worstell for the National Park Service
Yosemite National Park, Ahwahnee Comprehensive Rehabilitation Plan
As-Built Drawing of First Floor Plan, 2010
Created by Hornberger & Worstell for the National Park Service
Yosemite National Park, Ahwahnee Comprehensive Rehabilitation Plan
As-Built Drawing of Second Floor Plan, 2010
Created by Hornberger & Worstell for the National Park Service
Yosemite National Park, Ahwahnee Comprehensive Rehabilitation Plan
As-Built Drawing of Third Floor Plan, 2010
Created by Hornberger & Worstell for the National Park Service
Yosemite National Park, Ahwahnee Comprehensive Rehabilitation Plan
As-Built Drawings of Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Penthouse Floor Plans, 2010
Created by Hornberger & Worstell for the National Park Service
Yosemite National Park, Ahwahnee Comprehensive Rehabilitation Plan
“Plot Plan of Ahwahnee Hotel Grounds,” showing seventeen proposed cottages, February 17, 1930
Eldridge Ted Spencer and Olmsted Brothers
Yosemite National Park Archives, Linda Greene Cultural Resource Records
B. Early Views (Planning & Construction)

Left to Right: Bill Austin, Bureau of Public Roads Engineer; Washington Lewis, Yosemite National Park Superintendent; Stephen T. Mather, Director of the National Park Service; Gilbert Stanley Underwood, Architect; and Don Tresidder, President of the Yosemite Park & Curry Company at the proposed site for the Ahwahnee Hotel, May 1926

Harpers Ferry Center Historic Photos Collection, Image HPC-000048

NPS Director Stephen T. Mather at the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the Ahwahnee Hotel, August 1, 1926

Yosemite Research Library, RL 9462
The Ahwahnee Hotel under construction, Half Dome in background, October 11, 1926
Yosemite Research Library, RL 15459

The Ahwahnee Hotel Dining Room under construction, c. 1926-27
Yosemite Research Library, RL 15382
Interior of Ahwahnee Dining Room under construction; triangular chandeliers on floor, 1927
Yosemite Research Library, RL 15386

The Ahwahnee Great Lounge without furnishings, c. 1927
Yosemite Research Library, RL 15387
Early Views (Exterior)

The Ahwahnee Hotel Exterior with motor coach (looking northwest), c. 1927
Yosemite Museum Collection, YOSE 37683

The Ahwahnee Hotel Exterior (South end of Lounge Wing), July 1928
Yosemite Research Library, RL 10046
Ahwahnee Hotel and Half Dome, Unknown Date
Yosemite Research Library, RL 17344
Like Yosemite, the Ahwahnee—
is an experience

There could be no other Ahwahnee. Its spacious windows bring in the full sweep and grandeur of Yosemite Valley. It surrounds you with the rarest of native hardwood—diapers from Persia, rugs from the Pyrenees, bedspreads from Kentucky mountain looms, chains from provincial France . . . .

And the Ahwahnee table will surpass your best holiday appetite!

Rates per person, two in a room, are $10 a day, American Plan, with several rooms at $12 and $14. One person in a room, $12, $14 or $16.

Other Yosemite accommodations, $2.25 upward, European Plan. A ten percent discount is effective until March 4th on reservations of three days or longer. See your travel agent or Yosemite Park and Curry Co., 39 Geary St., San Francisco. EX brook 3906.

$10 per day per person—room and meals

Yosemite's best vacation begins with

the Ahwahnee

You'll see Half Dome from your solarium lounge; majestic Yosemite Falls from the baronial dining room; Glacier Point and the nightly firefall from your bedroom . . .

You'll golf on Ahwahnee meadows or play tennis on guest courts a few steps from the Merced river . . .

And you'll follow the saddle trails that radiate from Ahwahnee terraces to every corner of the Valley floor and into the snow-capped Sierras overhead.

In its year-round holiday diversions, as in setting, The Ahwahnee in Yosemite.

Rates (subject to a 10% reduction for a week's stay or over) are $10 a day, American Plan, for two in a room, with several rooms at $12 and $14. For one in a room, $12 to $16.

See your travel agent or local travel agencies for reservations, or call at the Yosemite office, 39 Geary St., San Francisco. EX brook 3906.

$10 per day per person—room and meals

Winter and Summer Advertisements for the Ahwahnee Hotel, c. 1928
Yosemite National Park Archives, YPCC Collection, Series 7, Subseries 3
East Terrace and Wildflowers, Yosemite Falls in Background, c. 1932
Yosemite Research Library, RL 4478

The Ahwahnee Hotel with snow, c. 1940
Yosemite Research Library, RL 4480
Early Views (Interior)

Registration Lobby, Photo by John Shrawder (Yosemite Ranger-Naturalist) 1947
Yosemite Research Library, RL 14342

Sweet Shop, unknown date
Yosemite Research Library, RL 10534
Stairway in Elevator Lobby, c. 1930
Yosemite Research Library, RL 15384
Ahwahnee Hotel Great Lounge, c. 1930s
Yosemite Museum Collection, YOSE 37680
Ahwahnee Great Lounge, July 20, 1927
Yosemite Research Library, RL 10261

North wall of Ahwahnee Great Lounge showing Mondrian-style mural
painted by Frann Spencer Reynolds in 1946 (The mural was painted over in 1980)
Yosemite Research Library
Solarium (looking east), c. 1927
Yosemite Research Library, RL 10543
Dining Room (looking southeast), c. 1927
Yosemite Research Library, RL 4477

Bracebridge Dinner in the Ahwahnee Dining Room, December 1927
At center are Don and Mary Tresidder as Squire and Lady Bracebridge
Yosemite Research Library, RL 6216
Guest Room 210, c. 1927 (note stenciling on wall around the doorway)
Yosemite Museum

Guest Room, Photo by James Lloyd (Yosemite Information Ranger), 1927
(note stenciling and “Tyrolean cabinet”)
Yosemite Museum
Birthday celebration for Stephen Mather on the Sixth Floor covered balcony, July 1928
(The space was enclosed with glazed walls to become the Sun Porch shortly afterward)
Yosemite Research Library, RL 9289
Early Views (Naval Convalescent Hospital / Naval Special Hospital)

Commissioning of the U.S. Naval Convalescent Hospital, June 1943
Photo by Joseph Lilleg, Navy pharmacist
Yosemite Research Library, RL 13752

Sailors golfing at the U.S. Naval Convalescent Hospital, Photo by Ralph Anderson, June 7, 1944
(note temporary buildings in background)
Yosemite Research Library, RL 13998
Great Lounge, converted into “Ward A,” containing more than 100 beds, c. 1943-45
Image from *History of the United States Naval Special Hospital, Yosemite National Park*

Dancing in the Dining Room, U.S. Naval Special Hospital, c. 1943-1945
Department of the Navy, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Archives
C. Selected Written Sources


*History of the United States Naval Special Hospital, Yosemite National Park, California.* Yosemite: Yosemite Park and Curry Company, 1946.


**Yosemite National Park Archives:**

Concessions Management Office Records  
Series 1, 3

Design and Engineering Flat Files

Historic Newspaper Collection  
Boxes 1, 2, 3, 7, 8

Linda Greene Cultural Resource Records

Old Central Files  
Series 3, 6, 7, 10

Resource Management Records  
Series 2, 5

Shirley Sargent Collection  
Series 1, 2

Yosemite Park and Curry Company Collection  
Series 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9

Yosemite National Park Museum Collection (Photographs):  
Collection 1026

Yosemite Research Library:  
Ahwahnee Hotel Folder  
Historic Photograph Collections