

Casa Carolina

The Enchanted Hacienda

Past, Present, Future?



Few Americans have experienced the pleasures of living in one place for most of a lifetime. Casa Carolina, a unique family home in Yucaipa, California, holds that kind of continuity. For the larger community, it represents a rare connection to history and the potential for a special legacy.

From its beginnings in 1945, “The Casa” was a labor of necessity and love. It began as a simple shelter for Emil, Caroline, and young David Schmidt, who moved here as a family from New York. Emil Schmidt was a tax expert, diplomat, and negotiator of international contracts, who had done family gardening in the New York State countryside and was drawn to the dream of subsistence farming.

He was ready to leave the high-paced, urban lifestyle behind, and his wife, Caroline, an artist, was game. Yucaipa was a land-rich location that was barely developed, but its clean air and water, fruit trees, and great mountain views inspired them to start anew in California.



Neither knew a thing about construction, and building materials were scarce in the post-War era. But with U.S. government “how-to” instructions in hand, they gleaned used materials, traded with locals, and put salvaged parts to use, building Casa Carolina in stages following natural contours of the land. An individual-cage facility for 7,000 chickens was among the first things they built on the ten-acre plot to sell eggs. The main house and cottage grew as life demanded.



The entire structure is a hand-built work of art, with primitive brickwork, rambling layout, massive open-beam ceilings, railroad ties for door frames, and mission-style clay roof tiles. The thick adobe-like concrete block walls, ceramic tile floors, and roof overhang keep the interior cool in hot summers. These features came together with remarkable harmony, along with a much deeper, soulful presence.



This ambiance can be attributed to its inhabitants, who lived in Casa Carolina with creativity and an ever-evolving purpose. Caroline obtained a kiln and developed into a skilled ceramicist and sculptor. In 1951, old friends of the Schmidts, who

represented foreign governments at the San Francisco World Peace Treaty Conference, along with many other dignitaries, visited them in Yucaipa.

Several years after Emil Schmidt passed away, Caroline's new husband, Cliff Youngquist, moved here to live, adding Sierra Club leaders and many others to the circle of Casa friends, including luminaries such as the great American photographer Ansel Adams.



Casa Carolina was owned by its original owners, who sold it and moved away. In 1994, David Schmidt bought the property back and returned. He restored and improved many features of the Casa, and lives there happily to this day. His mother's chicken facilities are gone, as is the kiln, but the mature trees and lush landscaping cradle the abode like an oasis of calm and healing.



The future of Casa Carolina is an intriguing question. How could this artisanal private home eventually be used for a higher purpose? As a historically significant building unique to Yucaipa, it is an architectural asset to the city. But how can the intrinsic beauty of this special place be preserved while serving the community?

Some suggest that the estate, with its uniquely inspiring ambiance, is well-suited as a venue for creativity in the visual arts, music, theater, or writing. As such, it could be a place that extends and enhances Yucaipa's planned performing arts center and uptown renewal project.

In addition, it could complement Yucaipa, another notable historic home; Casa Blanca, a vineyard and wine-tasting venue; and an art school and museum, including artwork by its original creator, Caroline Schmidt. It could be used for other activities, such as San Bernardino County Master Gardener seminars or environmental activities.



In the meantime, Casa Carolina remains an elegant elder in the community, inspiring visitors to pursue their own creative endeavours and healing activities. The Schmidt family hopes their estate will serve a future purpose and be developed into an entity of enduring value to Yucaipa and its visitors.

Your ideas and inspiration are profoundly welcome. Please join in the creative effort to sustain Casa Carolina forever.

Thank you with gratitude.

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