



COURTESY PHOTO

Judge Marcel Cerf, who owned the villa now called Casablanca Inn & Bistro, strolls on the beach in a historic photo.

## SANTA CRUZ

# Historic hotel set for revamp

*Historic Buildings*

By Jondi Gumz

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Change is in the air at the beachfront Casablanca Inn & Bistro.

Charles Cheatham and Whitney Belvin, owners of the Tyrolean Inn in Ben Lomond, purchased the property at 101 Main St. last month for \$5.5 million from Ray and Glyndean Luttrell, who have owned it since 1976.

"This is the best view in Santa Cruz," said Pierce Lett, the new general manager, giving a tour of the 33-room motel and restaurant on

Beach Hill. He's handling the hotel side while Cheatham focuses on the property and Belvin the restaurant.

Married with a 10-year-old son, Lett said he's intrigued by the storied past of the Casablanca, a 1916 seaside villa once known as the Cerf Mansion with a guest list that included Hollywood celebrities Stan Laurel and Bette Davis.

"I want to do it justice," said Lett, who expects rooms to be renovated after the summer season.

A week ago, Lett met

with local historian Ross Eric Gibson, who brought a photo of San Francisco Judge Marcel Cerf, the first to live in the villa, wearing an overcoat and bowler at the beach.

"This is where the Sea Beach Hotel was," Gibson said, explaining how the first-class three-story hotel with 180 rooms on the trolley line burned in 1912.

The 6,884-square-foot Cerf mansion, designed by architect George McCrae, was built in a Mediterranean style with elegant arches,

fireplaces, private balconies and gardens. Gibson's photos show the Cerf Mansion as a forested estate, with only the tile rooftop visible to the general public.

After Cerf died in 1935, the property was acquired by attorney Stanford Smith, commandeered by the military during World War II, then became the Casablanca, named for the 1942 film starring Humphrey Bogart.

The restaurant, once called Surf Rider, was built in 1951.

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