



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos



The Hemp

HOTEL

New Santa Cruz B&B offers a medical marijuana-friendly respite

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Hotels and Bedding Houses

SANTA CRUZ

MARIA MALLEK-Tischler sorted through colorful tile pieces for a large walkway mosaic, the front-yard centerpiece for the city's newest bed and breakfast, the Compassion Flower Inn.

She has stenciled into the walkway an enormous hemp leaf, or, for the less discerning, a maple leaf.

It is an image replicated throughout the once-dilapidated 135-year-old house at 216 Laurel St., between Pacific Avenue and Center Street, which has undergone a full-scale renovation.

"It will be the first 'BB&B,'" joked Maria's partner, Andrea Tischler.

The first "B" is for "bud," as in marijuana bud.

The couple has spent decades as activists in the movements to legalize the medicinal use of marijuana and hemp cultivation.

The past three years, however, they have focused on restoring the historic house, a labor of love they say has cost them a half-million dollars and a lot of patience.

They open for business March 20, as the county's first hemp and medical marijuana-friendly bed and breakfast.

"We intend to appeal to a wide spectrum of people," Andrea said. "We want this place to be where local people can come and people from the U.S. and Europe can visit."

The inn's Web site (compassionflowerinn.com), still under construction, will have links to medical marijuana sites.

It will be a place where people who have a physician's recommendation can use marijuana, the couple said.

"As long as it's in compliance with the law, I strongly support it," Maria said.

The couple has gained the respect of city officials for the care they have put into the restoration.

"It's absolutely beautiful inside," said Don Lauritson, Santa Cruz associate planner and head of the city's Historic Preservation Commission. "The artistry inside is just amazing."

Huge bay windows with views of Laurel Street and the lacy "carpenter gothic" exterior decor were recreated to maintain the historic feel of the place.

"They've done a wonderful job bringing back the front rooms," said Tom Conerly, an architect who worked with the couple on the project. "They are as close to the magnificence of the original structure as possible. They went far beyond the call of what anybody would expect them to do."

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Maria Mallek-Tischler works on a faux-marble finish for the front-porch pillars of the Compassionate Flower Inn. At left, Mallek-Tischler and her partner Andrea Tischler examine curtain fabrics.

B&B

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The couple paid for extensive foundation work at the outset, Conerly said. "It was run-down," but it also had "good bones." The ridge line was straight.

In the late 1800s, the house was owned by Judge Edgar Spalsbury, who, according to his published diary, spent his days hunting, picking blackberries and visiting the beach. He suffered from tuberculosis, and would make regular trips to a downtown pharmacy, where he would buy opium to ease his pain.

Maria said the home's history has a hold on her. When she walks downtown or to the Boardwalk, she remembers it as the stroll that Judge Spalsbury once took.

Over the years, the house became a boarding house. In the early '50s, a mortuary next door planned to raze it for a parking lot.

The couple gutted walls and floors, rebuilt staircases and transformed a skinny labyrinth of neglected upstairs rooms and hallways. They installed hydronic floor heating, a system of pipes that course with hot water.

They dismantled enclosed porches, lean-tos and sheds, added on in the back of the house. Upstairs is a large gathering room with 16-foot A-frame ceilings and windows on three sides. They call it the Church of the Obvious, and plan to encourage yoga, meditations and drum circles.

Three years ago, Andrea was driving by the house the day a real estate broker was pounding in a "for sale" sign out front. Within weeks, they were the owners of the 2,800-square-foot triplex for \$210,000.

On one side is a parking lot, on the other an old office complex that once housed the Planned Parenthood clinic.

Although the house is not a designated landmark, it still has historical significance and there were a series of meetings with the historic preservation panel to hammer out renovation issues.

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"You have to really want to get involved with that kind of a building and damn the cost," Conerly said. "You just really have to want to preserve these houses and go in that way."

Guests will have parking via Birch Lane, an alley recently refurbished by the city. They will enter through a new kitchen, rich with mahogany cabinets and floors.

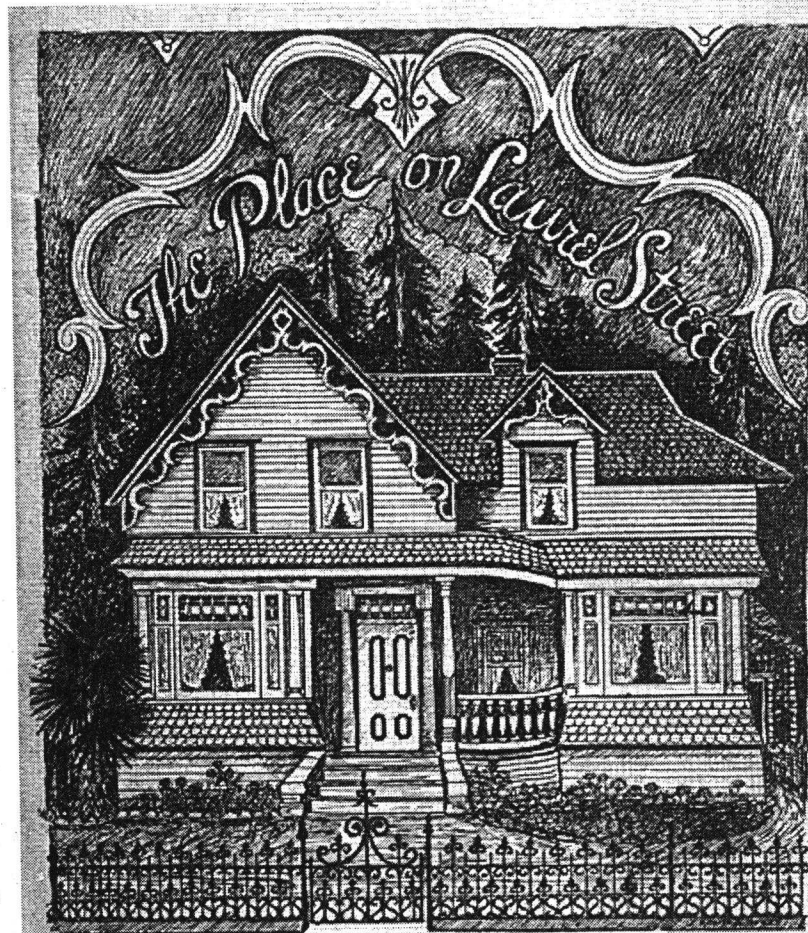
An artist by trade, Maria set tile designs into walkways and bathrooms. She has created intricate stenciling and faux molding and marbling along the high walls.

Among the rooms are the Hemp Room, the Blue Room and the Lovers' Suite. The downstairs room is wheelchair-accessible. A few of the second-floor rooms are smaller — designed for visitors on a budget.

In keeping with the marijuana theme, hemp products will be available, such as shampoos and soaps. Hemp linens will adorn the rooms. There will be passion flower tea.

"I'm always happy when buildings like these find somebody who loves them," said Ross Eric Gibson, a Santa Cruz historic architectural consultant.

Judge Edgar Spalsbury, who published his diary, owned the house at 216 Laurel St. in the 1800s.



The Diary of
JUDGE EDGAR SPALSBURY