

# New life for Maria Teresa

Historic structure has a new role

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# Outlook

## Business

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One of the oldest buildings in Albuquerque, empty the past four years, is expected to be resurrected as a venue for private parties, wedding receptions and corporate affairs. Most recently known as the Maria Teresa Restaurant, the expansive traditional adobe building at 618 Rio Grande NW was recently purchased by the owner of the nearby Hotel Albuquerque, Heritage Hotels & Resorts, as an upscale party annex. "I didn't have a clear-cut use for the property until a couple weeks ago when it dawned on me," said Jim Long, principal partner and CEO of Heritage. "We're bringing it back as a place to congregate."

Alternately known as the Salvador Armijo House, the hacienda-style building is generally believed to date to the 1840s and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. It has, of course, changed over the years but still retains the original core and style. "It's a remarkable property and surprisingly large," Long said. The 10,000 square-foot building is broken into a warren of rooms that once served as the salons, kitchens, dining rooms and bedrooms to generations of the expanded Armijo family. The building also incorporates another 8,000 square feet of inner courtyards and gardens.

In all, the property covers one acre. "It now has a heavy Victorian flavor," Long said about the interior, which will be renovated "to have a modern look with roots in the 300 years of (local) Spanish history. We're going to invent a style for this." The new style, he said, "will be versatile enough for people to customize their parties." The courtyards and gardens will be refurbished, but the hacienda exterior and tall walls will be retained. The new interior style will be big on glamour, Long added. Details on the renovation are still in the planning stage and no project budget has been set, he said. Long plans to have the building ready for use in June.

Its new function as the Hacienda at the Hotel Albuquerque will be as "a place to customize and craft a special event," he said. Event planners and other staff will do the work. Although no longer a restaurant, it will still have its own kitchen. "It's going to be like renting an upscale house for a party, without all of the time and energy to plan and do it," he said. Guest will also be able to tap the resources of the 11-story Hotel Albuquerque, which has 188 rooms, two restaurants, a bar, and 41,000 square feet of meeting space.

The building, which had been converted to apartments, was still in the Armijo family hands when it was sold in 1977 to the Tinnie Mercantile Co., a restaurant chain owned by the late Robert O. Anderson of Roswell, an oil executive, rancher, and civic leader. Maria Teresa Restaurant, named after a coin, opened later that year. The property changed hands several times before local restaurateur Larry Gutierrez bought it in 1993. Best known as the owner of Little Anita's Restaurant, Gutierrez closed Maria Teresa in January 2004. The restaurant, which offered expensive haute cuisine, had not done well in the sluggish economic recovery following the 2001 recession.

The property was put on sale at an asking price of \$2.5 million, then sat empty and unused until Heritage Hotels purchased it.

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