

# ~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

## At Casa Orinda, the spirits aren't only the kind you drink



Photo Vera Kochan

Two orbs in upper left corner of the main dining room (circled)

By Vera Kochan

The popular fine dining restaurant, Casa Orinda (casaorindarestaurant.com), known since 1932 for its hearty fare and cowboy-type ambience, seems to have a bevy of guests remaining on the premises long after closing hours.

Located at 20 Bryant Way in Orinda, the establishment has had a colorful past back in the 1960s when illegal gambling, and possibly more, was delegated to the upstairs area. There was even a murder reported in 1965, by local newspapers of the day, when original co-owner Thomas B. Snow was found lying on his back beside his new car, shot on his way home along Taylor Boulevard in Pleasant Hill one evening. The case has never been solved.

Casa Orinda's employees and customers alike have experienced unexplained noises and ghostly sightings quite frequently. Although current owner, John Goyak, doesn't give any credence to the phenomenon experienced by others, he good naturedly consented to this article and an investigation.

General Manager Claudia Tata has devoted nearly 10 years to the restaurant, but can only claim one personal odd occurrence when she opened the main front door one day only to see a glowing, red ball of light float past her out of the building.

Bartenders have mentioned occasional odd and unexplained noises near the bar area; and one server refuses to go upstairs to the back room.

Tata explained that on two separate evenings children have witnessed ghosts in the upstairs area. During one sighting, a family was having a meal downstairs when the 9-year-old son asked Tata, "Who are the three people at the top of the stairs?" She looked and saw no one there. He asked her to follow him upstairs and kept insisting that the three "peo-

ple" were still there, yet she could see no one.

There are three tables for private dining upstairs. One evening a 5-year-old boy began screaming uncontrollably. Tata raced up the stairs and asked the father what was wrong. He replied, "Oh, my son sees ghosts."

Assistant Manager C. Rose has been with Casa Orinda for 25 years and used to experience electrical difficulties with the computer and printer in the office area upstairs. She often sensed the presence of three entities (a man, woman and child). She decided to acknowledge them with a greeting before she began her duties each day and has never had electrical issues again.

During this reporter's visit to the restaurant for interviews and photos, a shadow, very low to the ground, came around a corner and shot into another room. Several times, in certain areas of the restaurant, the flash feature on the camera refused to work, leaving the captured photo black as the restaurant has no windows downstairs to provide illumination. However, there were also instances when orbs (floating balls of light/energy) were captured on camera, too large to be considered a speck of dust.

Realizing that there was more here than just noises that went bump-in-the-night, Rose (email: lacienrose@mac.com), a practicing shaman, who helps people to create a happier space in their homes by seeing things through color, suggested that a friend of hers could be of greater help in identifying the activity.

Two days later, Holly Million, a professional shaman, artist, herbal medicine-maker and micro-homesteader arrived at Casa Orinda, in order to put some focus onto the odd happenings. According to her website (hollytheshamanartist.com), "When I was a child, I had one foot in this world and my other foot 'on the other side.' As I got older, I

realized that I was super sensitive to energies, people's vibes, intuitive insights. In recent years, I began to have more and more mystical experiences. As an adult, I realized the best word to describe me must be 'shaman.' A shaman is a bridge between the material and spiritual worlds, between the seen and unseen worlds."

Before this reporter even mentioned seeing a shadow two days earlier, Million stated she had seen one as well and said that not only does Casa Orinda have ghosts, it's loaded with them, and they are from varying time periods and walks of life.

In the course of 1.5 hours, Million spotted a woman from the 1950s wearing a knit dress in one of the dining rooms; George (a bartender for 30 years); Denny (another long-time bartender); a washer woman dressed in 1800s attire; and more – and that was just the downstairs. Upstairs she saw three women; and a man in back of the storage room who was dressed in dark western-style clothing with an intense demeanor. Even though the restaurant wasn't opened until 1932, Million stated that the different time periods where the ghosts come from are due to the fact that they often drift about, and then attach themselves to places that suit them. In Casa Orinda's case, it has always been a lively establishment, and so the departed have gravitated to the atmosphere and the company.

Rose has also seen a woman and a young girl (approximately 8 years old), often together, but isn't certain if they are related.

Million and Rose have agreed to return to the restaurant at a later date to perform a cleansing and release as many of the lost souls that are willing to move on. Hopefully, after that, the only spirits remaining at Casa Orinda will be in a bottle.

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## Halloween events planned to brighten the season



Photo J. Wake

In addition to enjoying spooky (or somewhat silly) decorations displayed in Lamorinda neighborhoods (skeletons seem to be the popular item this year), community members can enjoy a few fall events for Halloween, such as the Halloween Harvest Festival at the Moraga Farmers' Market from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Sunday, Oct. 30 – which includes a costume parade at 10:30 a.m. as well as mini pumpkin decorating – and the Halloween and Karaoke Movie Night, with Karaoke (at 7 p.m.) and "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" screening at 8:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 29 at Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette. –J. Wake

For information, visit [www.cafarmersmks.com/events/halloween-festival-wjz7f-yc825](http://www.cafarmersmks.com/events/halloween-festival-wjz7f-yc825) and <https://www.townhalltheatre.com/>

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