



# postscript.

## Hacienda El Cóbano

As work progresses in the renovation/restoration of the 18th-century Tuscan monastery in Arrezo, Italy, that will be the University of Oklahoma's new Study Abroad residential campus, excitement builds within that fast-growing program. New? Exciting? All that, of course, but this is not the first time OU has had a residential presence in another country—as Richard Hancock well remembers.

In the mid-'60s the University was involved in training for the Peace Corps through its continuing education programs, and its man in Mexico was Hancock. There he met Angel Lara, a Mexican-born U.S. citizen whom he hired to assist with future training programs back in Norman. When Hancock introduced Lara to his boss, Dr. Thurman J. White, the vice president startled them both by asking Lara to find someone in Mexico willing to give OU a hacienda, a place where OU could hold a wide range of conferences, workshops and short courses in a setting far from Oklahoma.

Lara found a perfect fit in Hacienda El Cóbano, a large facility in a beautiful setting owned by a wealthy man who agreed to its free use for 10 years—provided the University would fix up the long-vacant structure. The project was not as daunting as the Arrezo make-over has become, but it did require a \$25,000 grant in 1967 from the OU Foundation and Lara's direct supervision with Hancock's oversight.

Hancock, in memoirs written many years later, recalls the renovated Hacienda as "breath-taking" surrounded by large trees and wide lawns in the shadow of Colima's towering volcanos. The building had lodging, dining and conference facilities for 30 people; spacious bedrooms with adjoining bathrooms; meals prepared onsite and served in a dining room that could seat 60. The large patio and vast cloisters could accommodate gatherings of several hundred villagers and guests, routinely for the fiestas that opened most conferences.

Developing programs for the new ven-

ture was on-the-job learning for the staff, particularly Hancock, who remained its director for most of its life until moving to OU Student Affairs as international service officer. Obtaining class credit for the total-immersion language courses was especially challenging, but by 1970, the Hacienda was hosting 300 to 400 people annually.

The typical offering was a week long—



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bird-watching, watercolor painting, photography, Spanish for adults and winter trail rides. In the summer University students took over for two month-long Spanish courses, earning five credits per session at a cost of \$795 (in 1980) for everything except airfare. OU's Professor Jim Artman and Orlando Jardini from Chatham College ran the Spanish program for more than 20 years. Hancock's wife, Nancy, who taught Spanish on Oklahoma Public Television, also offered a one-week visit to the Hacienda to her estimated 4,000 viewers.

Dick Hancock recalls that room and board was \$6 a day when the Hacienda first opened, and airfare from Oklahoma City to Guadalajara was \$140. A chartered bus then took participants on a harrowing five-hour ride to the Hacienda over a very poor mountain road.

The Hacienda was located in the village of El Cóbano, six miles east of the City of Colima and an hour's drive from an exceptionally beautiful coastal region.

While originally established to immerse Americans in Mexican culture, a real cultural exchange grew up around this program. Hancock brought two musical groups to Colima—the Oklahoma Youth Orchestra and folk singers from Wartburg College of Waverly, Iowa, directed by an OU alumnus. In return the OU staff took the Ballet Folklórico of Colima to Oklahoma, a venture fraught with complications but ultimately rewarding. The Oklahomans even arranged for a full-scale rodeo in Colima, complete with real American cowboys.

Two trademark programs that became mainstays of the Hacienda's operation were the watercolor workshops conducted by noted artist Milford Zornes and the bird watching sessions, normally conducted by OU's Gary Schnell and Warren Harding, which often included appearances by the University's internationally famous ornithologist George Sutton.

The Hacienda also hosted programs for other universities; the Dallas Social Security Office; the Peace Corps; the OU schools of medicine, business, education and journalism; archeologists; musical groups; churches; tennis clinics; and even an outward bound program.

Actual ownership of the Hacienda became a problem at one point. The wealthy owner found himself less wealthy, even lost his home and wanted to reclaim the OU center as his residence. His threat of a law suit to break his contact with the University was staved off by intervention of the Hacienda's Mexican friends, and the crisis was over.

The University's Mexican adventure continued but eventually support for its activities diminished until in 1990 the Hacienda was sold to the University of Colima. Hancock's memories are fond ones—"it was an unique place. Because of the innate attractiveness of climate, terrain and culture," he recalls, "one visitor likened it to 'the summer home of the Wizard of OZ.'"

One wonders what he would have thought of Arrezo. —CJB