

2015 Governor's Historic Preservation Awards

Carmel Mission Basilica



The Carmel Mission Basilica project took on the ambitious task of restoring one of the oldest and better known churches of California's twenty-one Spanish- and Mexican-era missions. The Carmel Mission was founded by Junípero Serra in 1771 and served as the first headquarters of the Alta California mission system. Completed in 1791, the Basilica is the first of only three stone mission churches in California. By 2012, the Basilica was in great need of attention as no major work had been done to it in seventy-five years. The general state of disrepair, including the lack of seismic strength, threatened the Basilica, its priceless artifacts, and its continued use by the community.

The goal was to restore and strengthen the church so that no other major work would need to be done for at least another seventy-five to one hundred years. Members of the community formed the Carmel Mission Foundation to fund the restoration project. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation were followed, as was the Code of Ethics of the American Institute for Conservation. Because the site and structure contained human remains going back centuries, an Indigenous Peoples consultant was employed to advise the project team and supervise reburials.

Technical craftsmen were specially trained to replicate all damaged and removed parging and plaster, using sand, charcoal, and seashells similar to those embedded in the original material. Damaged wood was repaired with material colored and textured to match the aged wood. Walls and buttresses were

seismically retrofitted with steel rods inserted into horizontal and vertical cores. 3-D laser technology was used to accurately measure roof components, ensuring precise sizing and placement of pre-cut wooden supports.

To aid future restorers, a complete package of information was compiled about this preservation effort, including drawings, documents, time-lapse and still photography, and video. The Carmel Mission Basilica restoration project has ensured that this historic church will continue to welcome visitors from around the world for years to come.

Learn more about the [Carmel Mission and the restoration project](#).