

### Insurance Engineers Blueprinting Fantastic Winchester Mansion; Four Month Project to Cost \$5,000

The unbelievably nightmarish Winchester Mystery House is finally being blueprinted—and the plans are as intricate as any maze designed by a psychologist to run a mouse through its paces.

Three engineers are taking four months at a cost of \$5,000 to go over every inch of the weird mansion on the outskirts of San Jose, along a tourist mecca.

The blueprinting of the strangely beautiful palace probably never would have been attempted except for a modern day gimmick called fire insurance.

Without a sprinkler system, it is virtually impossible to have fire insurance at a reasonable price. And sprinklers can not be installed without blueprints.

Thus, the trio of engineers are probing the enigma of the mystery house with dividers and rulers and a fine tooth comb. What their plans show thus far is enough to make every housekeeper turn topsy turvy with confusion:

Twenty kitchens, each completely equipped with gas ranges or electrical stoves.

Five elevators, more than 150 rooms, and a multitude of heating systems including electrical, gas, steam, and hot water.

Fifty fireplaces, the chimneys of most only half completed.

Staircases leading into blank walls, and staircases that wind around for several floors and go nowhere.

Most of the rooms are on different levels. Doors lead into other doors. And where closets should be are only suites of rooms, and where rooms should be are corridors and doors opening into windows.

D. S. Nichols, vice president of the Barnard Engineering Corporation of San Francisco which is installing the fire protection system, said he will place more than 2,000 sprinklers in the four floor dwelling.

Some rooms—like the great ballroom where no orchestra has ever played and no dancing couple ever cut a fancy rug—will be equipped with up to twenty sprinklers.

The sprinkler system, which will cost an additional \$45,000, will include 20,000 feet of pipe, each piece cut to the exact erratic length required, and sprinkler heads that will pop off automatically at 165 degrees.

The two owners of the Winchester Mystery House—Ida May Roney and Mildred Farris—decided upon the sprinklers as a means of guaranteeing their income. Previously, fire insurance companies refused to write policies on the rambling mansion in a grove of trees.

According to Nichols, sprinklers extinguish 97 per cent of the fires breaking out in houses so equipped and fire insurance rates of sprinkler-equipped homes are about one-tenth those elsewhere.

To those unfamiliar with the legend of the mystery house, it was built by Sarah Winchester over a period of thirty-six years with a portion of the \$20,000,000 fortune left by William Wirt Winchester, founder of the Winchester Arms Corporation.

Mrs. Winchester, so the story goes, was once told by a seer that she would build a beautiful castle some day and never die until it was completed.

She chose the suburbs of San Jose as the perfect site for her mansion and maintained it for twenty-two carpenters who sawed and hammered away, day and night, winter and summer, adding rooms and belfries and closets at her whim.

They had no designs, no blueprints and no pattern. They just added, added, and added.

Finally in 1924, at the age of 82, Mrs. Winchester died, never seeing the completion of the house which now stands as a \$5,000,000 monument to the futility of superstition.

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