

PHOENIX RISING?

OUT OF THE ASHES OF SALZ TANNERY COMES THE TANNERY ARTS CENTER.
WHAT'S AT STAKE AND HOW MUCH MORE FUNDING DOES IT REALLY NEED
TO BECOME THE ARTS MECCA EVERYBODY HAS DREAMED OF? **BY PETER KOHT**

Tanneries

The industrial revolution is over. A brutal and dirty age, it stormed over the seas from Bristol, transforming New England hamlets into mill towns and staining vast stretches of the Midwest into the rust belt.

But now, with the assistance of free trade agreements and telecommunications, the industrial base that employed our parents and grandparents has largely receded into the setting sun, passing into the east and leaving a trail of slag, scrap and wealth in its wake.

Many trades, like shipbreaking, textiles and tanning are almost completely absent from the modern American economy. But you can find them—and armies of workers—in foreign lands like Cambodia, China and India in an ever-quickenening race toward the bottom of the labor market.

After the jobs leave, part of grappling with the post-industrial identity complex is figuring out how to deal with the relics of heavy industry. Silent sentinels of progress like motor plants, grain elevators and textile mills, are huge constructions, frequently toxic, but full of potential.

In Essen, Germany, the leviathan Zollverein mine-cokery ceased pumping out coke for steel production in 1986, the victim of falling steel prices and rising labor costs. After a decade of toxic cleanup, the German government repurposed the Bauhaus style factories. Designed by Fritz Schupp and Martin Kremmer, they evolved into a massive complex for the creative arts, housing concert halls, schools and museums in the former fiefdom of the Krupp arms empire.

In Massachusetts, the former Sprague Electric Works factory, a superfund site, was re-imagined as the MASS Museum of Contemporary Arts. It economically revived the moribund town of North Adams by making it the largest center for post-modern visual and performing arts in the county.

Similar fates have met a former mattress factory in Pittsburg, Pa., a Nabisco factory in Beacon, New York, and a foundry in Brussels. A grain silo in Canada has even been turned into a massive musical instrument that you can play over the internet at silophone.com. Within months, the ruins of the last tannery on the west coast are slated join the ranks of these other artistic projects.

GT 7-12-07

Bought by the City of Santa Cruz's Redevelopment Agency in March 2005 for \$6 million, the eight acres adjacent to the San Lorenzo River on River Street that was the Salz Tannery will be methodically and carefully transformed from an industrial relic into an artistic colony that combines live/work, studio and performance spaces.

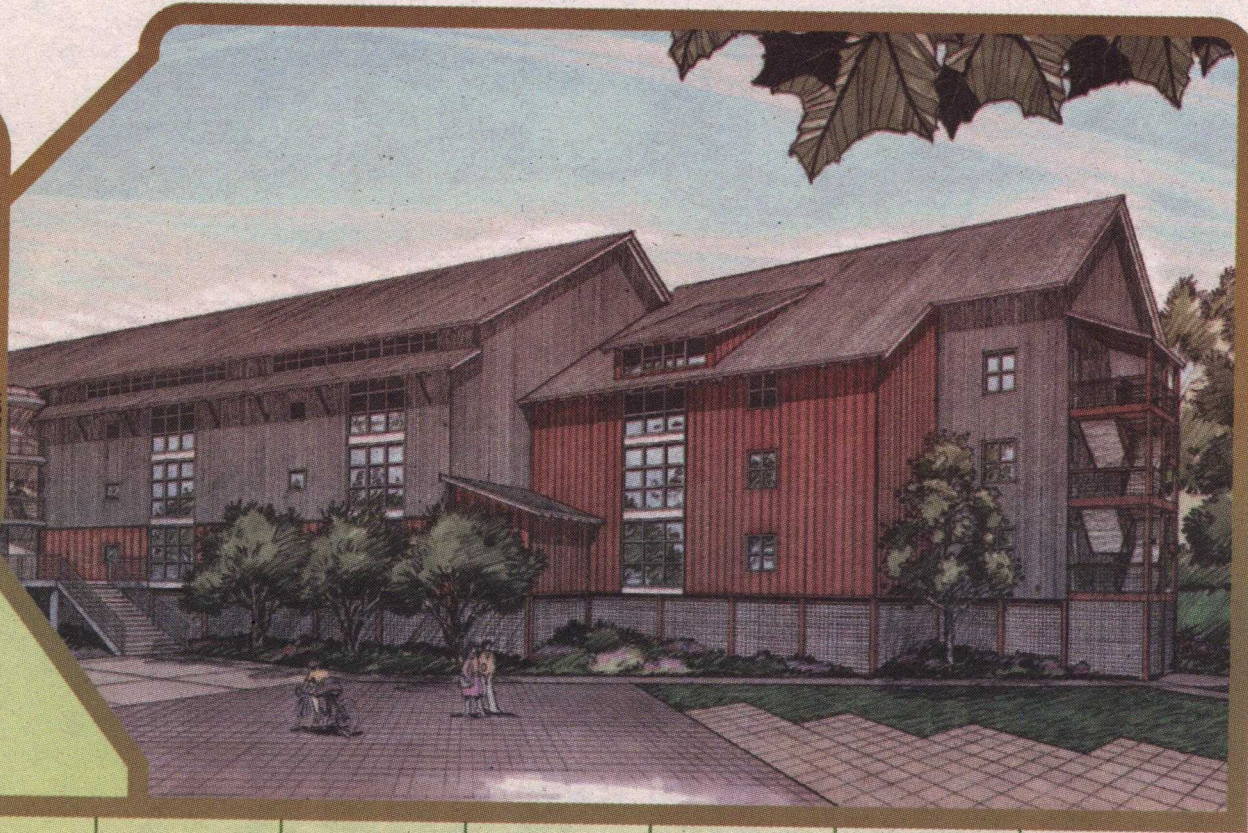
Originally budgeted at \$43 million (but likely to cost upward of \$50 million by the time the paint is dry), the Tannery will be built in three phases over the next four years, creating the Tannery Arts Center. First will come the Tannery Lofts, which will provide low-income housing for residents who identify as artists. The Working Studios will offer residents and community members a chance to lease and utilize high quality, low-cost studio space. Meanwhile, the Creative Learning Center will house local arts nonprofits as well as gallery and performance spaces.

If all parts fall into place, project backers hope to create a haven of artistic refuge and creative communism in the middle of one of the nation's most crushing housing markets while nurturing, Santa Cruz's unique artistic identity.

PHOENIX RISING



CHARLES MIXSON



These days, it's all about cleaning house at The Tannery (above). Right, an artist's rendering of a proposed live/work space slated to be built. The new building will hold 100 units of affordable housing which includes studios and three-bedroom units.

THEN

1856

First Tannery built on banks of the San Lorenzo by James Duncan and William Warren.

1856

First tannery washed away in winter floods.

1866

Rebuilt San Lorenzo Tannery (one of ten in the county) purchased by Prussian immigrant Jacob Kron and renamed Kron Tannery.

1917

Kullman-Salz and Company buys the tannery.

1934

Fire at the tannery causes \$200,000 in damage.



1954

Ansel Adams photographs the tannery.

1977

Norman Lezin returns the company to local control, purchasing it from industrial conglomerate Beck Industries.

2001

Salz Leathers closes.



2005

Land sold the city's Redevelopment Agency after extensive toxic cleanup.

2007

Ground breaking on first phase of the Tannery Arts Center.

NOW

Amongst the Ruins

"We're gonna need a flashlight," says Kirby Scudder, darting back into his apartment in the Kron House, a residential structure on the Tannery grounds. Part pilgrim, part security force and part public relations firm, Scudder and five housemates are an advance force for the 100 families that will move into the Tannery Lofts sometime in 2008.

Asked to establish a presence onsite to cut down on the vandalism and illegal camping that had been occurring there since tannery operations ceased in 2001, Scudder and his cohorts have already established a gallery, the Dead Cow, in their brief tenure in the historic home, which began in March.

Starting from the Dead Cow on a late Sunday afternoon, Scudder takes me on a meandering three-hour tour of the future arts facility. At the moment, the tannery is a landscape in transition. One building was only accessible by dodging a beehive, while entry into others required braving multiple locks and acrobatics. But Scudder sees beyond the present discomforts when talking about the Tannery.

He uses his cigarette to point to huge grey piles of rock and dust. "Those are the foundations from two of the aluminum buildings that have already been knocked down," he says. "The Redevelopment Agency decided it would be cheaper to grind up the foundations and use them for the housing component than truck it out and bring in new concrete. It should get spread in about a month."

On Aug. 1, the money should be in the bank to pay for that project. At the end of June, the city council approved ground leases for 100 units of affordable housing for artists earning at or below 50 percent of Area Median Income (\$53,998 for individuals, \$61,941 for a family unit). It's the first, and some would say most critical, phase of the Tannery Arts Center.

A rental project in its entirety, occupancy is not expected to be the problem. Local painters, musicians and poets are chomping at the bit for a reprieve from the rental market.

"The whole range of artists are an unappreciated workforce," says Ceil Cirillo, the head of the city's Economic Development (Redevelopment) Agency. Over the last six years, Cirillo has arguably done more to create the Tannery Arts Project than any other local official.

"They don't make enough money to even support where they live and that's unfortunate because of how important they are to a community," Cirillo adds. "Looking at how many people are artists in Santa Cruz and what a strength that is, and matching it with the adaptive reuse potential of these industrial buildings for studio space and performance space seemed a perfect match. I just got dogged about it."

A public/private venture, the housing element will be managed by the John Stewart Company and developed by ArtSpace, a nonprofit from Minneapolis that has built artist colonies in other American cities like Portland, Seattle and Washington

DC. The groundbreaking on the affordable housing component comes after years of grant-seeking, leveraging and financing.

The pricetag? More than \$34.9 million, which will come from federal, state, county and city funds. The funding equation includes \$4.2 million in-tax exempt bonds, \$8.6 million in state loans for multi-family housing and \$1.2 million from the city's Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

"The housing is all new construction," says Greg Handberg, Artspace's vice president of properties, who worked to secure funding for the project. "This will be our fifth all-new construction project and it will be new construction on a site that is heavily historic. Figuring out how to create something in that space has been a lot of fun, but the river and the Brownfield issues have made it complicated."

Mopping up the Mess

Brownfields is an Environmental Protection Agency definition for sites where redevelopment is complicated by "the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant." It definitely applies to the tannery.

Used as a worksite for more than 140 years, the land became a toxic mess, with byproducts and chemicals used in the tanning process leeching into the alluvial soils for generations.

Pointing to two massive steel-hashed redwood barrels labeled "Thing A" and

"Thing B," Scudder explains what obscure purpose they once served.

"Those were in the aluminum buildings that got demolished where the housing is going to go," he says. "They used to be vertical and rotate. The hides, which were blue [from chromium salts] would go into the tops and be tumbled to soften them up in a chemical bath. Can you imagine that? Pouring chemicals into a rotating tumbler? Unbelievable."

Behind Scudder, a giant concrete cylinder gapes into the riverbank by the property line, the relic of Salz's efforts to manage the "liquor," or contaminated water, that was a byproduct of its leather tanning. So far Salz Inc. has spent more than a million dollars cleaning up and capping off the chemical tailings of their operation.

Artspace's Handberg says the housekeeping, while intricate, hasn't been onerous. "The timing of the cleanup and the impact it's had on constructions has been complicated, but it's been a very good process overall."

Other onsite messes were created more recently. SWAT teams and the fire department used to regularly drill in the buildings, but when they went home at night, the empty buildings were repeatedly breached by campers intent on carrying off everything that wasn't tied down—and some stuff that was.

Moving aside a fence and opening two padlocks, Scudder and his flashlight breach the upper floor of the Beam House. It's a ruin, with auction liquidation papers strewn on the ground, graffiti on the walls and one

PHOENIX RISING



room whose sheetrock walls went 10 rounds with an angry mob. The path up to this section of the tannery passes over broken glass and ferrous floors that crunch beneath our sneakers.

“Over here, see these clippers?” Scudder asks, pointing at a makeshift pair on the metal floor. “This homeless guy broke in here and was stealing single-gauge copper wire. You can get \$2.50 a pound for it, but can you image the effort? That guy had to be tweaked out of his mind.”

But the single-string bandit doesn’t win any awards for his nocturnal adventure. One vandal broke into the main power substation at the tannery with a set of garden shears. The only thing separating the iron cutters from carrying a lethal load of current to their wielder’s hands was a thick pad of wrapped duct tape around the handles. It’s a feat so daring in its stupidity that it almost inspires respect.

White Walls

Leading the way into a former drying room, which is lined with thousands of hooks where Salz’s signature product, California Saddle Leather, would have dried on wooden sheets suspended from the ceiling, Scudder dices up the architecture of Phase II of the projects, the Working Studios, which will one day occupy two floors of now claustrophobic and serpentine Beam House.

“It’s going to be in two halves, the ‘loud arts’ and the ‘quiet arts,’” he says, answering the implicit question in the second half of his statement. “Loud is anything like a foundry or glass blowing or welding. Disciplines that need a lot of equipment and involve banging around a lot of materials. The soft arts are like drawing and painting.”

It’s envisioned that artists will form small working groups to share equipment like kilns and presses. In fact, listening to planners talk about this aspect of the project gives hope to the fact that Santa Cruz might soon boast some new artistic guilds, an idea dramatically unexploited since 16th-century Florence.

Work on the studios phase of the project is slated to begin in spring 2008. With the Redevelopment Agency having tapped into the California Cultural Heritage Endowment Fund to come up with elevation and architectural drawings, the design work is fairly well along. The status of the project's \$3 million loan request to the state for Proposition 40 (California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act) funding is still pending, but city officials and Artspace are confident that its funding is on the way.

Plans call for a reintegration of natural lighting into the Beam House, clearing away the utility boxes and pipes that block out so much of the summer sun now. Some walls will be moved, but most will be preserved, which will keep the cavernous building cool in summer. Each redwood-planked wall is lined with tan oak chips, which, in addition to being remarkably good insulation, used to serve as the site's main source of tannin.

Coming to the end of the drying room, Scudder takes a right out onto a catwalk that used to connect all the buildings on site. Looking back toward downtown, he points at the barn-like body of the Hide House across the cleared lot that stretches beneath his feet. "That's where the Creative Learning Center will be."

It's fitting that Scudder says this while standing on a truncated connecting walkway. The final, and fuzziest part the Tannery Arts Center lies on the other side of an unprecedented master planning process, a gargantuan fundraising effort and several hard years of work.

Bringing in the Sawbucks

Unlike the studios and housing overseen by ArtSpace, the Creative Learning Center will be managed by a nonprofit entity called, confusingly enough, the Tannery Arts Center. Although phase three's groundbreaking is not scheduled until 2009, the group is spending this summer completing work on an arts master plan for the site.

Spearheaded by the board, with assistance from the Cultural Council, local nonprofits and prominent performers, the Creative Learning Center's master plan will most likely feature classrooms, offices and meeting space for arts organizations and the future home of the Santa Cruz Ballet Theatre. It might even boast a radio station. The problem is that of coming up with a business plan that doesn't include a structural deficit—a tricky equation when modern dance makes up a line item. Coming up with a schema where revenues match expenditures—both one time and ongoing—is a complicated calculus.

"I think we've managed it," says George Newell, the executive director of the nonprofit. "Our plan is to have an affordable place for artists to do their programming. Our permanent tenants will help assume ongoing costs and we'll do as much fundraising now to make sure that later on we are not saddled with debt, which would drive up ongoing

expenses. We also want to be able to schedule out the classroom, rehearsal, office and performance spaces."

Newell continues by ticking off the incomes side of his hypothetical balance sheet, but first there's construction costs to worry about—\$15 million.

To reach that sizable sum, the nonprofit is facing a huge, two-pronged development effort. On the one hand, the board, made up of local financial and artistic luminaries, will be peering into foundation and grant money to offset the costs of the experiment. Newell expects to be able to find all but \$5 million in this kind of support.

For the remaining \$5 million, the organization will have to run one of the biggest development campaigns seen in the arts in this county—ever.

"We'll have a groundbreaking ceremony for the housing component on Sept. 16, so that's going to kind be the official start of the fundraising effort," Newell says. "Then the next 18 months we'll be working to secure major donors before doing a really public campaign for the balance."

Asked about the pricetag, Santa Cruz mayor and long-time Tannery advocate Emily Reilly says, "It's a big challenge, but I think they are going to succeed. As soon as people take a tour, they understand the possibility of this project and understand that it's really something special. It's going to change the perception of Santa Cruz County all over the nation."

"THIS COULD BE REALLY SOMETHING, A POWERHOUSE ... GOING TO BE GOOD FOR THE ECONOMY, BUT JUST THINK ABOUT WHAT IT DOES FOR THE SELF ESTEEM OF THE ARTS COMMUNITY."—Kirby Scudder

Figuring out how the donor and arts community will respond to such a huge capital campaign is unclear at this stage in the game, but all those worries are further down the line. Closing up the Hide House, which now houses a hodgepodge of former fixtures and office detritus, Scudder starts trotting toward his temporary home on the other side of the property.

"This could be really something, a powerhouse," he says, short of words for the first time in three hours. "It's like a stake in the ground for art. Where else are you going to find 65,000 square feet of studio space? It's not only going to be good for the economy, but just think about what it does for the self esteem of the arts community."■