

S A N T A C R U Z

ARCHITECTURE

A mosaic of styles is the hallmark of local design

by Sheila Schmitz

IN THE last 150 years Santa Cruz has gone from a small seaport with lumber, mining and agriculture industries to a resort attraction, university town and counter-culture mecca. As a result, Santa Cruz is a mosaic of more than a dozen design traditions, including Spanish-style adobes, Victorian mansions and modern industrial centers of concrete, steel and glass.

Many of Santa Cruz's historical buildings have weathered the years partly because of the sheer number built during the area's rapid development 100 years ago.

John Daubenbiss was busy with sawmill ventures that helped provide for that development when he built his landmark home in Soquel. His box Italianate house went up in 1867-68. It later spent some time as a half-way house and sustained damage from use and neglect, but was restored in the late 1970s.

The principal elements of the house include rectangular windows with tiny gables, a main porch with balcony and a bulbous, brick chimney. Overlooking Soquel and acting as the town's focal point, the home was protected from floods and offered an ocean view. Its simple lines and understated details contrast with the complexity of the Victorian homes built later in the cities.

Those historical, often beautifully ornamented buildings were thought to be out of style and too difficult to remodel earlier in this century. Some were torn down. But they continue to dominate the area's architecture.

A stunning example is the Villa Perla, a Colonial Revival house at 520 Soquel Ave. (photo A). The house was designed in 1893 by Edward Von Cleek for the father-in-law of Fred Swanton, the flamboyant

entrepreneur who built the first casino, also designed by Von Cleek, on what later became the Boardwalk. Named for Swanton's wife, Pearl, the house underwent remodeling in 1980.

An eyebrow window with leaded glass peaks from the attic, and a pointed tower punctuates one corner of the house. The porch's ornate concrete chaises and fluted pillars greet visitors, and an upper balcony covers the entry. Colored tiles border the doorstep.

Builders installed glass bulbs under the eaves to light up Villa Perla for parties. Thick, plaster garlands drape the exterior, standing out against light-colored cornice. At one time, private trolley tracks led visitors all the way to the house.

"The house speaks of his (Swanton's) approach to Santa Cruz," said Terri Fisher, of Washington-Jensen Architects, Capitola. Now partially masked by storefronts along Soquel Avenue, the house remains a significant part of the area's architectural scrapbook.

Another period piece is the Boardwalk (photo B), itself a mix of design styles. Its present look is the result of a series of remodelings and restorations that have gone on since 1903, when Swanton and John Martin formed the beginnings of the amusement park.

Relics of the original facility are still visible. Though the old salt-water pool lies filled with sand under the miniature golf course, the pool's scalloped-shaped edge rims the course and hints at the artifact buried below. The Natatorium's voluminous arched roof remains intact, though skylights have been added. And preserved on the wall are plaster scenes of bathing water nymphs — examples of the art by Italian artist Michelangelo Garibaldi that originally decorated the interior.

The casino's original floor tiles and Corinthian pillars can be seen in the video-game room. A patch of ornate plaster ceiling is still left above one of the souvenir booths.

When the latest arcade was built three years ago, builders tore down a 1906 wood facade and discovered more plaster designs, this time scowling male faces of Greek gods. A false ceiling was also torn away, revealing

more nymphs. The discoveries are being kept safe in the Boardwalk's basement, awaiting a return.

Outside facing Beach Street, the Boardwalk roofline of planes and

arches shows the same Moorish style as nearby Casa Del Rey Hotel, once connected to the Boardwalk by a raised pedestrian walkway.

Architects have had mixed feelings about the Boardwalk's hodge-podge of designs and repeated renovations. But "the Boardwalk is the building I'd feel worst about losing," said Richard Rahders, of Thacher & Thompson Architects.

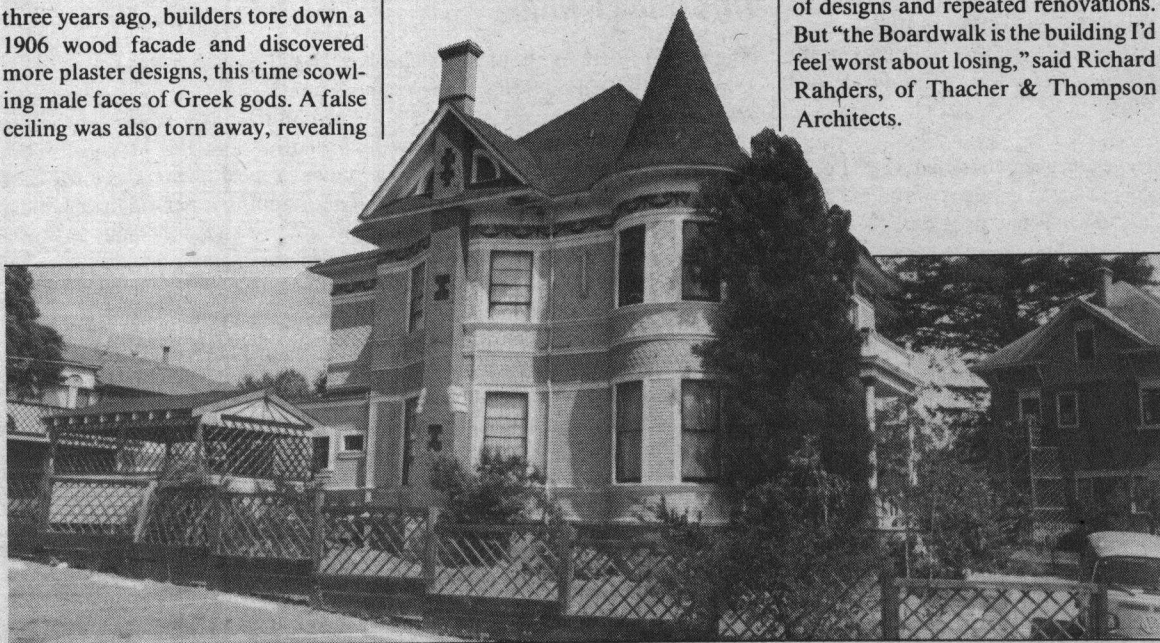


Photo A: Colonial Revival at 520 Soquel Ave.; intricate wood-working highlights baroque style

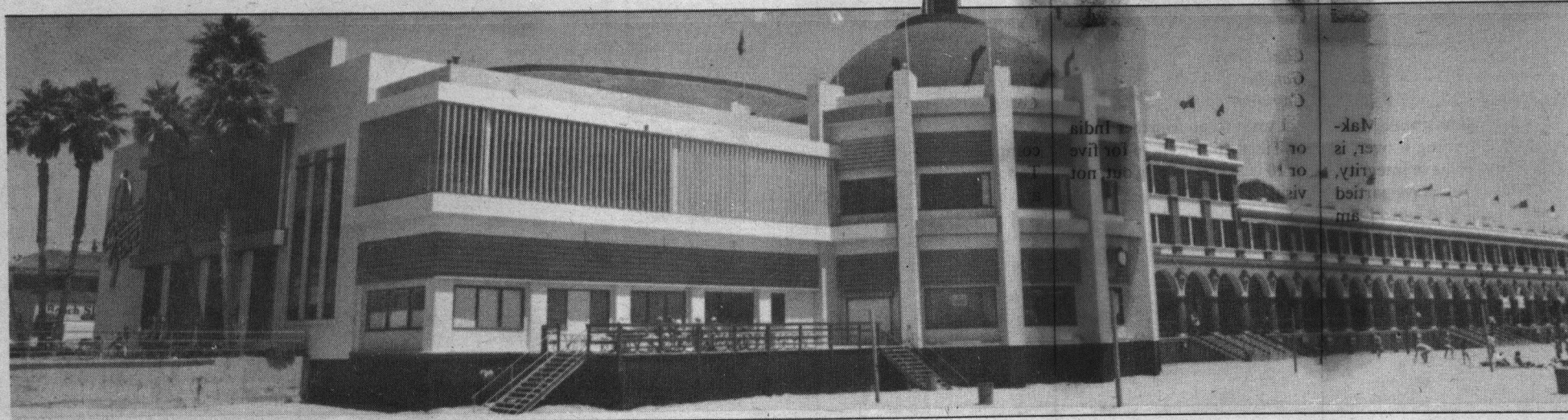


Photo B: The Boardwalk, a mix of design styles including Classical Greek ornamentation (inset)

In the mountains, the citified Victorian architecture made a place for itself in the form of the Cody House in Ben Lomond (photo C). The house also reflects the difference between life in the hills and life in downtown Santa Cruz around the turn of the century.

A wide, two-story porch borders more than half the exterior, extending the living space to the lush environment outside. Simple clapboard siding and thick shutters are the traditional white and green.

The tall, copper-plated chimney echoes the upward swoop of five redwoods at the entry. Among the sparse ornamentation are stick pillars, the railing divided by crossed boards and some latticework. Large and numerous windows also add design by breaking up wall space.

The house has five different levels, layered gables jutting in different directions and another room sitting like a crow's nest on top.

As Santa Cruzans began dropping the fancy detailing of the last century, they revived Colonial American features and the arched windows and balconies of the California missions. Their architecture began to make use of the environment, as did the Cody

House, but with an accent on simplicity, using historical or rustic exteriors and breaking down barriers between indoors and out.

Those trends appear in the older portion of Santa Cruz City Hall (photo D), designed in the Monterey Colonial Revival style in the late '30s by Monterey architect C. J. Ryland.

Wide, shallow steps lead through what is both an entryway and landscaped gathering place. The arrangement of trees, bushes and raised planters create outdoor "rooms," and covered areas around the building ease the transition between inside and out.

The broad walkway is a mesh of brickwork, and colored tiles ornament a central fountain. Solid columns with simple capitals dominate the building's front face.

Environment also plays a major role in the collection of Pasatiempo residences designed by William W. Wurster during the 1930s. The homes were built for elegant country living. One house featured Murphy beds installed in an open-air area, another had a room walled on three sides. One contained a "living porch" with

outdoor fireplace and dining table.

An example at 2 Hollins Drive (photo E) shows the simple, white exterior and light details that are Wurster's trademark. Thin wood trim decorates the porch, and dainty arches in the front yard help integrate the home with the landscaping. The chimney holds another clue to the house's designer — Wurster usually topped the plain chimneys with a thin, extending lip.

During this period of simplicity, architects didn't abandon style. The Mall's Del Mar Theater (photo F), built in 1936, boasts exploding upward lines and curves archetypically Art Deco. Bas-relief nude maidens pose among the urn-like decorations along the top edge of the building. Repeated scallop shapes, zig-zags, concentric arches and linear grooves use nearly all the exterior space.

The curves give the building a soft appearance that contrasts with the boxiness of buildings to follow. The square tilework around the base of the exterior was added decades later, when Deco was considered old.

The modern priorities of design and environment come together in the Interdesign building (photo G) off Highway 17 in Scotts Valley.

Clean, horizontal lines made by the simple redwood siding fits the building's site — a flat meadow bordered by redwood-covered hills. But simple lines don't shortchange aesthetics. Ample windows, low, simple pillars and understated angles in the roof streamline the building and give it lift.

The building's style sharply contrasts with the warehouse-like boxes

that have shot up to house the region's high tech industry.

Future design in Santa Cruz will undoubtedly add another dimension to architectural style, with the urge to maintain historical buildings in preservation-conscience Santa Cruz likely to mean much of the old is here to stay. •



Photo D: California Mission revisited in the Santa Cruz City Hall



Photo E: Indoor meets outdoor at 2 Hollins Dr.



Photo G: Interdesign's high tech



Photo C: The grand style of the Cody House in Ben Lomond



Cody House walkway



Photo F: Art Deco design, at the Del Mar Theater