

La Manzana: more than just a restaurant



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

A spacious courtyard adds to the appeal of the new La Manzana complex.

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WATSONVILLE — A painting is more than colors applied to canvas. Likewise, La Manzana is more than a few stores being remodeled.

La Manzana is Aptos restaurateur Manuel Santana's brainchild for restoring the center to commercial enterprise.

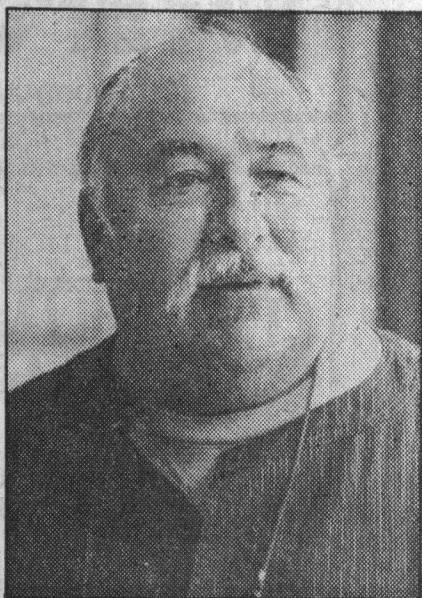
Unlike suburban shopping centers which stretch on for thousands of feet, La Manzana takes up most of a block on upper Main Street in downtown Watsonville, centered on a courtyard from which a restaurant, bar, ice cream shop, delicatessen, offices and retail stores will revolve around.

Originally it was scheduled to open this weekend, but rains have delayed the public unveiling until the weekend of April 13 and 14, said Santana.

However, as scheduled, this Saturday night will be a \$35 per person private fundraiser for the Art Museum of Santa Cruz County. Tickets can be purchased at the door.

La Manzana, at East Lake Avenue and Main Street, is the first of what many see as the gentrification of downtown.

In the next few years, Watsonville plans to level the 200 block of lower Main Street, erecting in its place a new post office and commercial center. A private developer



Manuel Santana

has received tentative approval to build a huge industrial complex behind Ramsay Park off Main Street.

When these projects are completed, they will bring a sorely needed facelift to upper and lower Main Street.

Why did Santana, who has successfully developed Manuel's restaurant in Seaclyff

and Jardines de San Juan in San Juan Bautista, build La Manzana here?

"Anywhere where you can find a courtyard with a garden, it's really intriguing," said co-partner Manuel Santana.

"You can't do this in Santa Cruz anymore."

The idea is to encourage the feeling of a commercial center, where people can exchange goods, food, cultural experiences and a little talk. Thus the name La Manzana, which besides meaning "apple" also means "square," according to Santana.

Santana sees Watsonville as "a good-looking town" with "real economic stability."

In keeping with the Latin influences of Watsonville, La Manzana has been designed in muted oranges, greens, mustards, blacks and whites by artist Roy Rydell and architects Washington-Jensen and Associates.

It's been almost a year since construction began on the massive project, and the front on Main Street still looks as inauspicious as it did in the old days.

But the front, formerly Holgerson's Dairy and Schmidt's Bakery, will be repainted and have new doors installed. Otherwise, it will be left intact.

The entrance opens up onto a walkway that leads to a courtyard decorated with

lush trees and flowers.

The East Lake Avenue side will also include a walkway leading into the courtyard, where brownbaggers will be welcome to enjoy a lunch and noon-time concert.

Santana and his wife, Alice, are general partners with Bud Kretschmer in this venture.

Alice Santana will run "Alicia's Delicias," an international deli offering pates, cheeses, coffees and other delights. "Delicias," by the way, said Santana, means "fantasies" in Spanish.

Across the walkway will be a French bakery, called Notre Pomme ("Our Apple" in French), specializing in croissants, breads and a few desserts. Evje Rodgers and Suzanna Waddell are the proprietors.

Santana will oversee the cooking in the La Manzana restaurant, which is the former Greyhound bus terminal. A glass-encased garden dining room sits just off the main building.

The interior is painted earth colors, ironically "manny green" and orange. "Strictly cosmic," said Santana.

La Manzana "will be exploring different kinds of Mexican food" than the normal fare in Watsonville, Santana said.

Instead of burritos and tacos, La Manzana will emphasize the already abundant influence of French, Indian and Spanish cultures on Mexican food, he said. The restaurant will showcase seafood, chicken and beef entrees cooked in sauces with exotic fruits.

"We tend to think of Mexican cooking as the rural kind," said Santana. "Ours will be more ... cosmopolitan in taste."

It will also be a bit pricier, but still within "moderate" range.

The kitchen itself is 7,000 square feet, dwarfing Manuel's restaurant in Seacliff.

A small wine and cigar-smoking room joins the restaurant with the Ojo Rojo bar ("Red Eye" in Spanish).

Completing the complex will be an ice cream store, Tulip Treats, serving Bud's and/or Dreyer's ice cream and a sportswear shop, Her Sports, owned by Lynn Vandiver.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The new restaurant will be "cosmopolitan in taste."

Santana said the upstairs will be reserved for offices.

Local artists will have a chance to showcase their pieces in glass cases lining the walkways and the atrium.

La Manzana is an ambitious venture, but Santana said he doesn't worry about competing with his other restaurants.

If you've got something people want, they'll come, he said.