

DREAMING UP NEW NAME FOR DREAM INN

Hundreds of ideas pour in from community; name to be unveiled Thursday



The former Dream Inn is undergoing renovations — and another name change.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Hotel closed for large-scale remodel; set to reopen June 2

By KURTIS ALEXANDER
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — How do you turn an aging mid-century high-rise into a four-star luxury hotel?

According to design consultants for the Coast Santa Cruz Hotel, formerly the Dream Inn, it starts with the name. And what they've got now doesn't work.

"The community still knows the hotel by its former name. It needs a new identity," said Kirsten Maynard, a spokeswoman for the hotel's management company, San Francisco-based Joie de Vivre Hospitality.

'I still like the name "Dream Inn." You grow up with that, and it's hard to think anything else will fit.'

RYAN COONERTY, SANTA CRUZ MAYOR

For the last three months, Maynard's team has been soliciting the Santa Cruz community for ideas on what to call the graceless, 10-story cinderblock hotel on West Cliff Drive, which happens to be one of the city's tallest and most visible buildings.

Next week, the management company will host a public reception to announce a new name. More than 800 suggestions poured in after a naming contest was announced last year.

Most harken back 11 years to when the neon Dream Inn sign hung on the hotel's tower — before new owners came in and decided to dub it the more generic West Coast Santa Cruz Hotel and later the only slightly more distinct Coast Santa Cruz Hotel. The suggested names honoring the past include: "Dream On Inn," Daydream Inn" and "Cloud Nine Hotel."

Other recommendations for the new

If You Go

WHAT: Announcement of new name for Coast Santa Cruz Hotel, with awards and reception.
WHEN: 4:30-5:30 p.m. Thursday.

WHERE: Coast Santa Cruz Hotel, 175 West Cliff Drive.

Hotel

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name seize on the hotel's location above the popular surf spot Cowell Beach, such as: "Rip Curl Inn," "The Swell Hotel," and "The Inn at Cowell's Cove."

Some suggestions were a bit more irreverent: "Believe Inn Santa Cruz," "Hallucination Inn" and "The Big Ugly Soviet Style Eyesore."

The effort to rename the hotel, which accompanies an interior remodel, comes as an alternative to tearing down the 1960s structure and starting the makeover from scratch, as has been proposed. Three years ago, then-owner Western Hotel Properties wanted to construct a new \$130 million hotel and conference center at the site but withdrew its plan in the face of public outcry. Western Hotel Properties sold the building shortly thereafter.

Nearly two decades earlier, a proposal to put 240 rooms across the street with a conference center and parking garage also went nowhere.

"It appears the community, as much as they may hate the way the building looks, does not want a whole bunch of new development there," said Maynard.

The current owner, Ensemble Hotel Partners LLC, chose to take the easier route. Last year, it hired Joie de Vivre Hospitality, a San Francisco-based boutique hotel company that prides itself on bringing the personality out of its properties, to dress up the existing structure.

Maynard said her plan is to express the new look and feel in the new name.

The name "Dream Inn," as perfect as it may be, was not under consideration because its rights are owned by a New York-based hotel operator, according to company officials. This week, however, company officials said they were still pursuing that option in the wake of hundreds of pleas from the community to resurrect the old moniker.

"I still call it the 'Dream Inn,'" said Celia Ramirez, the front-desk supervisor at the neighboring Sand and Sea Inn, whose desk is just steps away from the Coast Santa Cruz Hotel sign.

The mayor agreed.

"I still like the name 'Dream Inn,'" said Ryan Coonerty. "You grow up with that, and it's hard to think anything else will fit."

The latest sign still stands in front of the Coast Santa Cruz Hotel, though construction crews are now making several changes inside. The hotel remains closed during the remodel and is expected to reopen June 2.

Joie de Vivre Hospitality, which touts itself as a "fresh and inventive" company whose collections run the gamut of luxury campgrounds to Japanese communal baths to boutique motels, said the renovations in Santa Cruz include all aspects of the hotel: guestrooms, public spaces and meeting rooms.

Going for what company officials call a "luxurious, but natural" orientation, the remodel will include such amenities as surfboard and bicycle storage, iPod docking stations, an expanded pool and lounge area with trendy fire pits and a new restaurant serving organic and locally grown foods.

The 163 rooms, all with ocean views, go for upward of \$200 a night.

"Expect it to be a lot more luxurious and a lot more modern," Maynard said.