



# beyond the malls

Pacific Ave.

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Downtowns — new, old or rebuilt — still reflect a place's community spirit

**T**HE REVITALIZATION of older downtowns is one of the hot trends of the 1990s. Last week, we took a look at three area downtowns — Palo Alto, Los Altos and Menlo Park — that are enjoying a renaissance. This week, we look at four more that challenge the malls as shopping and entertainment destinations.

construction on nearly every block of Pacific Avenue. Vacant lots and empty storefronts are scattered here and there. But at least city leaders have finally figured out what they want to have happen in the area, and the downtown is definitely showing signs of life.

**Where is it?** Pacific Avenue, with some stores and restaurants on side streets.

**What's there?** Some big chains such as the Gap and Blockbuster Music (soon to be a Wherehouse), but also some fine  
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## Santa Cruz

Nine years after the Loma Prieta quake, downtown Santa Cruz is *still* recovering. There is



On Santa Cruz's Pacific Avenue, top, flower stands and kiosks were installed after the quake; above, a statue of the late Tom Scribner, saw-player and Wobbly.

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# Who needs malls when there are real towns?

## ■ DOWNTOWNS

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independents that have survived nearly decade of recovery. The smaller stores range from the venerable Dell Williams jewelers to fun places like Shandrydan and the Pacific Trading Co., which feature women's clothes and accessories, and Annieglass, with its marvelous glassware.

**Ambience.** Tourists, aging hippies, street kids, students, just folk. Some of the stores haven't changed much since the mid-1960s — for better or for worse.

**People-watching.** Definitely the cafe area outside Bookshop Santa Cruz.

**Parking.** It can be tough, but it's usually not bad. Best bet is a free public parking garage just off Pacific.

**Quick eats.** The kiosks that line Pacific. There's something for everybody.

**Top eats.** Oswald's, a terrific bistro just off Pacific across the courtyard from Kelly's bakery.

**Hot spot.** Santa Cruz boasts two of the best music clubs in the country just outside the main downtown area. Both Palookaville and The Catalyst are well-run and book a little something for everybody.

**Reads.** Can't beat Bookshop Santa Cruz, one of the great independents in the country.

**Flicks.** Both the Del Mar and the Santa Cruz show first-run films in newly renovated surroundings.

**Top tip.** Check out the Museum Shop in the historic Octagon Building adjacent to the McPherson Museum of Art and History. Just off Pacific, it has some wonderful original artwork and unique cards and postcards.

**Don't miss.** Integrand Design, which carries a wide range of cool housewares, and Mr. Goodie's, an antique store with attitude.

## Los Gatos

The downtown was hit hard by the Loma Prieta earthquake but has managed to not only survive but flourish. The Old Town Center has been renovated with a new Bor-

ders, a redone California Cafe and the first Oakville Grocery south of Palo Alto. New stores continue to move in, and the area bustles day and night.

**Where is it?** Main Street and Santa Cruz Avenue; the Old Town Center is off the main drag on University.

**What's there?** Because there's no mall in the immediate area, there is a significant chain store presence including Borders, The Gap and Smith & Hawken with more (Banana Republic, GapKids) on the way. But there are still plenty of smaller operations such as Domus, specializing in fun kitchen and housewares; Bears in the Wood, a great children's store; and Purrsnickety, which specializes in all things related to cats.

**Ambience.** On weekends, you could get severe Spandex rash from the bikers, runners and other fitness types who flock to the area.

**People-watching.** A downtown where folks actually come out to see and be seen. The stretch of Main Street that includes the Los Gatos Coffee Roasting Co. is the best.

**Parking.** Difficult. Most on-street parking spots are by permit only even on weekends. Off-street parking that runs parallel to Santa Cruz Avenue to the east fills up quickly. A new parking garage near Old Town is set to open this fall and it will help.

**Quick eats.** Try Andale Taqueria on Santa Cruz.

**Top eats.** Not as restaurant-rich as Palo Alto, but The Pasteria & Market, Steamers and I Gatti are all popular and good.

**Hot spot.** The Los Gatos Brewing Co. is the biggest scene in town. Jammed on weekends for both brunch and dinner.

**Reads.** Borders, which has taken over a wonderful location in the Old Town Theatre.

**Flicks.** The Los Gatos Theater is run by the Camera folks and features a mix of foreign and independent films.

**Top tip.** If you're into antiques, there is a lot to choose from. Most are concentrated on Main east of Santa Cruz.

**Don't miss.** Twig, a unique gift and artwork shop right at the corner of Main and



JUDITH CALSON — MERCURY NEWS

Bookshop Santa Cruz, a pioneer among independent book sellers, is also a good place from which to observe the comings and goings of Pacific Avenue.

## Santa Cruz

### Willow Glen

This is the real up-and-comer among the local downtowns. Until recently, the emphasis was on service retailers and, for some reason, auto parts suppliers. Now, the chains are showing interest, there are some excellent new restaurants and new stores are moving in almost daily.

**Where is it?** Lincoln Avenue between Willow and Minnesota.

**What's there?** The chains are circling as some of the older stores move out. Blockbuster is taking over an old auto shop on Lincoln. Starbucks is there, of course. But there are rumors in commercial real estate circles about the Gap, Banana Republic and others eyeing the area. Right now, the downtown is dotted with interesting independent stores such as the Rose Mille, Panache and Alta boutiques, the Black Sea Gallery, which features antique and replica furniture, and Casa Casa, the upscale gift shop.

**Ambience.** Upwardly mobile. Lots of families with young kids.

**People-watching.** The outdoor tables at La Villa Restaurant when they're doing

lunch-time barbecue.

**Parking.** Right now it's pretty easy, although how long that will last is open to question. There's off-street parking west of Lincoln.

**Quick eats.** The original Willow Street Pizza on Willow just off Lincoln. Still the best in town.

**Top eats.** Mio Vicino, the family-run Italian restaurant that just moved in on Lincoln.

**Hot spot.** The Glen, a sports bar that features a decent restaurant and billiards.

**Reads.** The best children's bookstore around: Hicklebee's on Lincoln near Minnesota.

**Top tip.** Keep an eye open for new stores. Juliann's Bakery and Freckles, a new children's boutique, are scheduled to open for business soon.

**Don't miss.** Park Place. It's a great spot for vintage clothing and fun collectibles.

### Capitola

This is a tourist destination, and its downtown reflects that. There's a heavy dose of T-shirt shops and on summer weekends, parking can be impossible. On the other hand, the downtown is really cute and has something no other can offer: its own

beach.

**Where is it?** Clustered around the Esplanade right on the beach.

**What's there?** If you want a T-shirt or a swimsuit, this is your place. But it's also dotted with art galleries, some very funky stores and interesting restaurants.

**Ambience.** Tourist and beach-lovers.

**People-watching.** Nothing beats sitting on the patio at Zelda's, which overlooks the beach.

**Parking.** On summer weekends, it's truly dreadful. The best bet is to park at the municipal lot just outside downtown and walk in.

**Quick eats.** A burger at the Fog Bank on the Esplanade.

**Top eats.** Check out the new Paradise Beach Grill, right next to the Fog Bank.

**Hot spot.** Margaritaville. A lot of people have wasted away evenings at this bar.

**Top tip.** Some of the gift shops look a bit on the tacky side from the outside, but persistence pays. Most have interesting items scattered amid the tourist trinkets. The Mole Hole is probably the best example.

**Don't miss.** Rainbow City Limits. It has a wonderfully eclectic array of Beatles items, quirky cards and gift items you won't find anywhere else.