

# 445/455 San Benito Commercial Renovation

Hollister, California

Architect: Hansen Associates Architects & Planners



The 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake devastated the downtown area of Hollister. Many buildings were declared structurally unsafe, and local businesses were faced with the difficult task of relocation. With a shortage of available sites, questionable structural integrity of those vacant, and a shortage of redevelopment grants, many businesses were forced to relocate outside the downtown area. So what was to happen to Hollister's downtown? Would it be rebuilt, abandoned, restored or redeveloped?

To help the City Redevelopment Agency decide, a competition for design guidelines was established. The program involved detailed site utilization studies and visual analysis, with the selected architect possessing experience in urban renewal, projects involving diverse client participants, and the generation of financial capital. The architect would play the role of designer, director and facilitator all at once.

The first buildings to be reconstructed were located at 445 and 455 San Benito, Merchants Bank and Mode-O-Day respectively. These two Victorian unreinforced masonry buildings, now tattered, vacant, and scheduled for demolition, had been the main historic anchors for the downtown area. With review of firm qualifications, Hansen

Associates Architects and Planners was selected. Led by Fani Hansen, an architect with over 25 years of experience in urban renewal, design and planning, Hansen Associates project experience included Sacramento K Street, Daly City, Pacifica/Rockaway Beach, Milpitas, Tiburon, and various San Francisco districts. The firm's dedicated responsiveness to complex projects, and history of schedule and budget accuracy made them the obvious choice.

With responsibility for structural upgrade, building renovation, and historic preservation, the first task was to decide on whether those buildings warranted restoration or renovation, and whether any of the existing structure could be reused. Recognizing the importance of the historic significance of the building's design, and deciding that reuse was possible, designs were drawn up to return the buildings to their original grandeur. Working closely with the Redevelopment Agency, city building authorities, community groups, and the private financiers involved in the project, a plan, schedule and budget was developed. All parties involved were considered with the commercial needs of the merchant clients at the top of the list. Financially, restoration would provide immediate financial savings over demolition and new construc-

tion, and long term gains in helping reestablishing a corner stone for the downtown revitalization. With a successful example, it was expected that other projects would follow, breathing new life into the community.

Designs were drawn up for a \$1.4 million mixed-use project, providing facilities for private offices and commercial retail. The design included structural framing (plywood shear walls and braced movement-resisting steel frames), new brick facades, repair of terra cotta arches, replacement of doors and windows, decorative sheet metal ceilings, plaster work, restoration of ornate wood moldings, stairs and skylights.

Over a period of only two months the design was finished, building approvals granted, community division unified, redevelopment loans secured, and the project was ready to be built. Contractor bids came in under estimated figures, and the project went straight into construction.

Completed in January, 1992, the success of this project has started a new movement of commercial urban renewal, and recognition of historical preservation as an economical alternative to demolition. The second redevelopment project located at 335 San Benito (see next case study), is just a few doors down from 445/455 San Benito.