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FREE July 1999 • Issue 16

The
Summer
Pops
begin
with a
bang!

(and a sizzle and
a whizz, etc.)

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LOFT LIFE
pg 20



**FOUND
MERCHANDISE**
Architectural
Salvage pg 10



**The City
Art Pages**



Plus THE ULTIMATE CITY KID FUN GUIDE *And of course* A brief history and giant pictorial on **The El Cortez**

photo courtesy of San Diego



D-TOWN Historical Archive

With
Gino Lizardi

A 1920s Crown Jewel

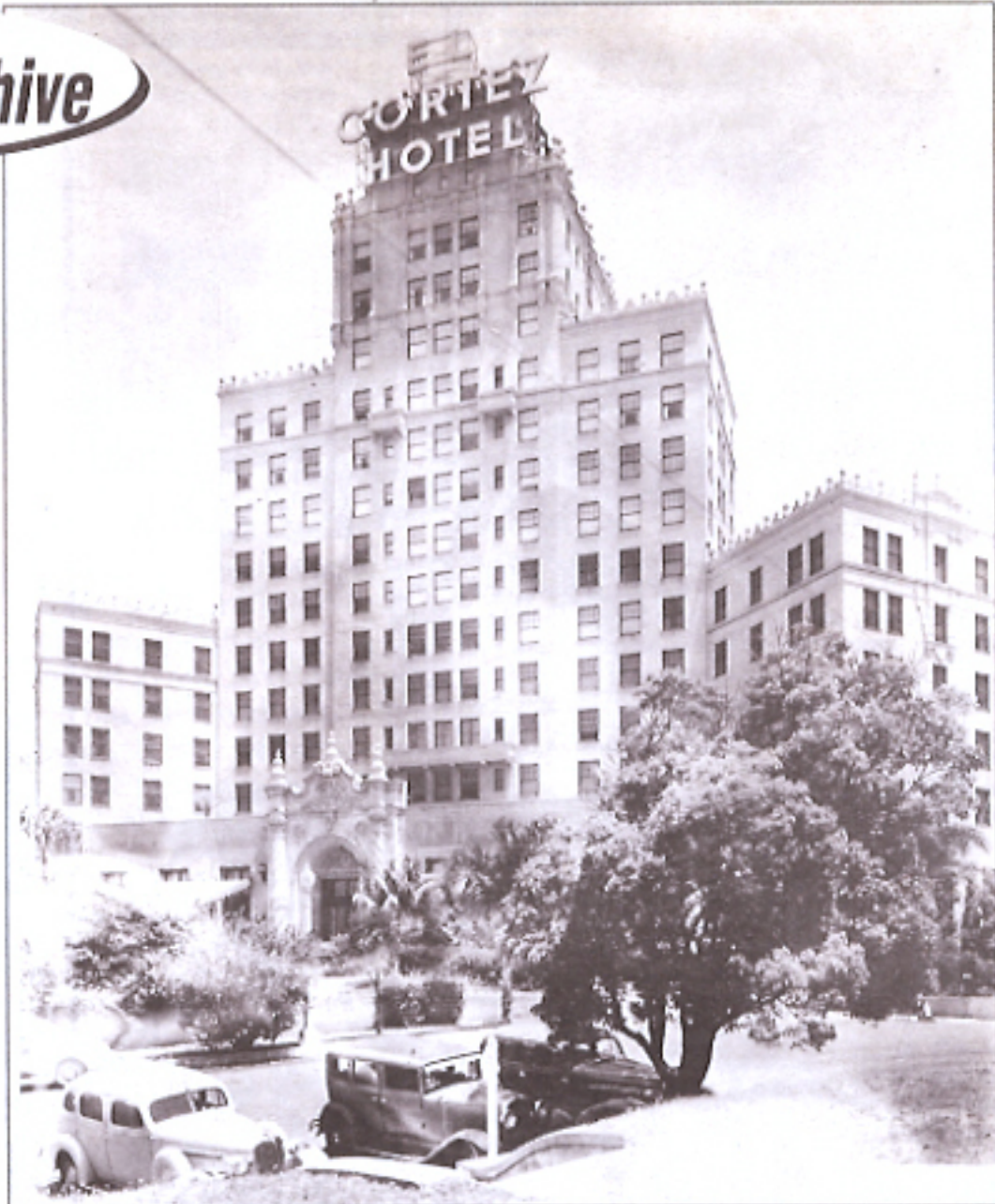
The El Cortez Hotel

Construction has finally begun on San Diego's historic El Cortez Hotel, kicking off the scheduled 14-month renovation of this storied landmark. The El Cortez once hosted the likes of Roy Rogers, Bing Crosby, Elvis Presley, and Presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower, Lyndon Banes Johnson as well as Gerald R. Ford. Other guests included Attorney General Robert Kennedy, amongst others.

After standing vacant for nearly 20 years, and through numerous unsuccessful plans in the past to refurbish the old hotel, the renovation of the El Cortez is expected to be completed by May, 2000. Historic preservation developers, the J. Peter Block Companies, plan to restore the El Cortez to its original 1920s grandeur, redeveloping the building into posh luxury apartments.

"We are excited to have the opportunity to renovate a structure which has been such an important part of many peoples lives for so long," said Peter Janopaul, co-managing member of the J. Peter Block Companies. "We're sure El Cortez will once again become a place for residents, as well as the people of San Diego, to enjoy." The project team also includes Kip Howard, Allegis (construction site management), Ninteman Construction Company, and Tanner Leddy Maytum Stacy Architects. Other developers plan to build condominiums and apartment complexes in the Cortez Hill district, joining the building boom in downtown hotel rooms, lofts and apartments.

Amongst the demolition and excavation activity around the project, an 1870s Victorian house will survive. Despite protestations from local preservationist, the old John Ginty House was moved from its old site to another lot nearby on Cortez Hill to make room for the new \$22 million redevelopment.



Above: The El Cortez in 1927. Photo courtesy of San Diego Historical Society.

El Cortez

-is Open
Thanksgiving

A new center of social activity in San Diego. An apartment hotel that is to be ultra modern in every detail. Splendidly Spanish...luxurious in appointments. Hospitality that will entice you to linger indefinitely in an atmosphere of culture, charm and contentment. Situated to command a superb panoramic view.



EUROPEAN PLAN

The magnificent Lounge, colorful Aster Dining Room, gorgeous Octagon Room for social functions and dancers, restful Roof Garden Retreat, women's Salon and ensemble of Smart Shops are but few of the many El Cortez features of interest to San Diegans.



Single rooms and spacious two, three and four room apartments. Reservations now being accepted. Brochure on request.

Frank Cummings, Jr., Manager

El Cortez in San Diego

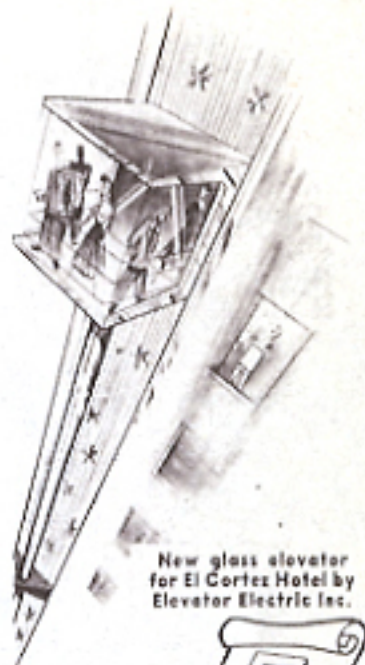
The Apartments at Hotel El Cortez, when finished, will consist of 85 apartments throughout the 16-floor structure, with each unit designed to take advantage of the panoramic views from every floor. The El Cortez will total 89,000 square feet in residential space: 36 one bedroom apartments, 45 two bedroom units, 3 three/four bedroom units, 8 lofts and more than 13,000 square feet of retail space. Monthly rates are projected to range from \$800 to \$2,400 per month for apartments and lofts. The building will also feature 1 two-level penthouse, for about \$4,000 a month. When completed, El Cortez' entire interior of the structure will have been meticulously refurbished, especially the famous elegant "Don Room," which was regarded as one of the most charming and architecturally significant rooms in the State of California. The worn facade will have been painstakingly restored to its original splendor, and the rooftop neon sign, which can be seen from Coronado to Point Loma to Mt. Helix, will be re-lit. On that occasion, there is certain to be a celebration for this auspicious event.

History of the Hotel El Cortez.

Fifty-thousand people swarmed to the grand opening of the new fantastic structure, the Hotel El Cortez, on Thanksgiving Day, 1927. It was developed by Richard T. Robinson, Jr., capitalist and San Diego landowner. One-third of San Diego's population was there for an unforgettable experience. The hotel was built atop downtown's Cortez Hill, on the site previously occupied by the historic U.S. Grant, Jr., Victorian mansion.

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A magnificent, \$2 million apartment hotel of Spanish Renaissance architecture reaching 14 stories toward the stars, El Cortez commanded a panoramic view from the foothills of Mexico to the ocean off Point Loma. By night, the hotel would serve as an observatory for the numerous lights of early 20th Century San Diego. The hotel catered to conventions, political rallies, weddings, anniversaries, proms, romantic liaisons, dignitaries, foreigners, locals, tourists, and military personnel. During World War II the Army put radar and anti-aircraft artillery atop the building.

A new era of great architectural change for the El Cortez began in 1951, when hotel mogul Harry Handlery purchased the property for \$1.5 million. Three years later, the hotel's Caribbean Wing addition opened, increasing hotel accommodations by 100 rooms and added a grand ballroom. The wing was dubbed by locals as Joan Crawford's shoulders. The plush Sky Room Bar on the 12th floor and the Starlite Roof with a 360 degree view was added, and elegant shops were opened on the street level.