

# Spanish Revival

**O**n Cortez Hill, high above San Diego Bay, El Cortez, a 16-story Spanish Renaissance landmark hotel, has made a \$23 million comeback as a luxury apartment building after standing empty since 1983. The building was restored to its original 1927 condition by owners and historic preservation developers Peter Janopaul III and Anthony Block, whose J. Peter Block Companies acquired the property in 1997. El Cortez, crowning the hill at the edge of downtown San Diego, is reminiscent of San Francisco's Mark Hopkins Hotel—which is no accident, because both were designed by architects Walker and Eisen of Los Angeles.

El Cortez has 85 apartments, including one- and two-bedroom units, studio/convertibles, lofts, and a penthouse, which range in size from 500 to 3,600 square feet and in price from \$1,000 to \$5,400 per month. Most apartments have views of downtown San Diego and the bay beyond;

those facing north and east overlook Balboa Park, a 1,200-acre urban park larger than New York's Central Park. The apartments are in 1920s Moderne style, with original rectangular tiles used in subways in the restored bathrooms but with 21st-century embellishments such as stainless-steel kitchen countertops in the kitchens. The 12th-floor units have indoor and outdoor fireplaces. Several other units also have fireplaces, and all have T-1 Internet wiring and operable windows. Each apartment will



have an E-mail address ending in ecc.com. Valet parking in an underground garage accommodates more than 100 vehicles.

Residents have use of a half-acre garden, a swimming pool, a spa, and a restored sports deck, and they are a two-block walk away from the San Diego Symphony's Copley Symphony Hall and a few blocks from San Diego's Gaslamp District. More than \$316 million in new development has followed the El Cortez project, including other new apartment and condominium buildings, a café and several street-level retail shops.

The building's historic sign, reading "El Cortez" in 12-foot-high red neon letters, originally was constructed in 1951 by neon master craftsman Vince Scillato of San Diego. Forty-eight years later, Scillato restored his sign, and it has been blinking atop the building since last October. —**Roger Conlee**, president of San Diego, California-based Conlee Communications, a public relations firm representing the J. Peter Block Companies, a historic preservation developer