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THE RISE OF DOWNTOWN TOWN

The Past 25 Years of Evolution

Twenty-five years ago, the Capitol was crumbling, Downtown Plaza consisted mainly of a Macy's store and the new 14-story office high rise at 555 Capitol Mall was considered a skyscraper. Today is a different story. After surviving a major economic recession and numerous political battles, downtown Sacramento has emerged as a city with a variety of interesting buildings—from renovated treasures to modern phenomena. While the local skyline may not rival New York or ▶



Chicago, there are some spectacular buildings and stunning views: from 11th and J, for example, you can see the terra cotta Elks Tower, the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament's elegant spires, the mammoth Renaissance Tower of black glass and the gleaming gold of the Capitol's rotunda. Our advice? Check out the highlights and trivia here—then bike, walk or drive downtown for your own tour of turn-of-the-century Sacramento.

1. Emerald Tower (formerly Capitol Bank of Commerce Center), 300 Capitol Mall—This 19-story, 371,000-square-foot slice of green glass was developed by the Benvenuti family and Capitol Bank in 1983 and, at the time, was the tallest building in Sacramento. (It's now the third tallest.) It was bought in 1986 for \$62 million by Jack Anderson, a well-known financier with a ranch in Davis and a casino in Las Vegas. He sold the building nearly immediately to Heitman Real Estate Services Group for \$81 million. Local scuttlebutt at the time was that the Heitman group grossly overpaid for the property, which may be true: in 1999, they sold it to Lend Lease Real Estate Investments, Inc., for only \$80.7 million. The building is 98 percent leased, with 70 percent rented to the State of California.

3. Memorial Auditorium, 16th and J streets—Originally built in 1927 as a memorial to Sacramento's war dead—and the site of USO dances during World War II—Memorial Auditorium had fallen into serious disrepair by the 1970s and was finally closed in 1986. Residents developed Measure H, the successful 1992 ballot initiative to reopen the auditorium that called for an advisory committee and city funding. Led by project manager Michael George, the team was able to stretch its inadequate \$10 million budget: the interior was restored, the building was made stronger and safer and a new memorial was unveiled. It is now the site for concerts, CSUS basketball games and Thursday night fights. Renovations are also currently being completed on the Memorial Auditorium's Little Theater—which will be named in honor of public relations legend Jean Runyon, who once earned \$25 a week as an actress there.

5. Downtown Plaza, K Street—Downtown Plaza originally opened in 1971 and was part of the city's efforts to revitalize a deteriorating urban center. Interestingly, 20 years later, a similar effort took place as the shopping center underwent a major—and risky—renovation. It reopened Oct. 20, 1993, during the height of the economic and real estate recession. The \$157 million project—which expanded the mall to 255,000 square feet of retail space and 120 shops, nearly twice its original size—includes a seven-screen United Artists cineplex, \$1.2 million worth of public art and a variety of popular restaurants, including the Hard Rock Cafe, which arrived in 1997. The renovation was done by the Southern California developers Hahn Co. and Jerde Partnership and the chief architect was David Rogers.

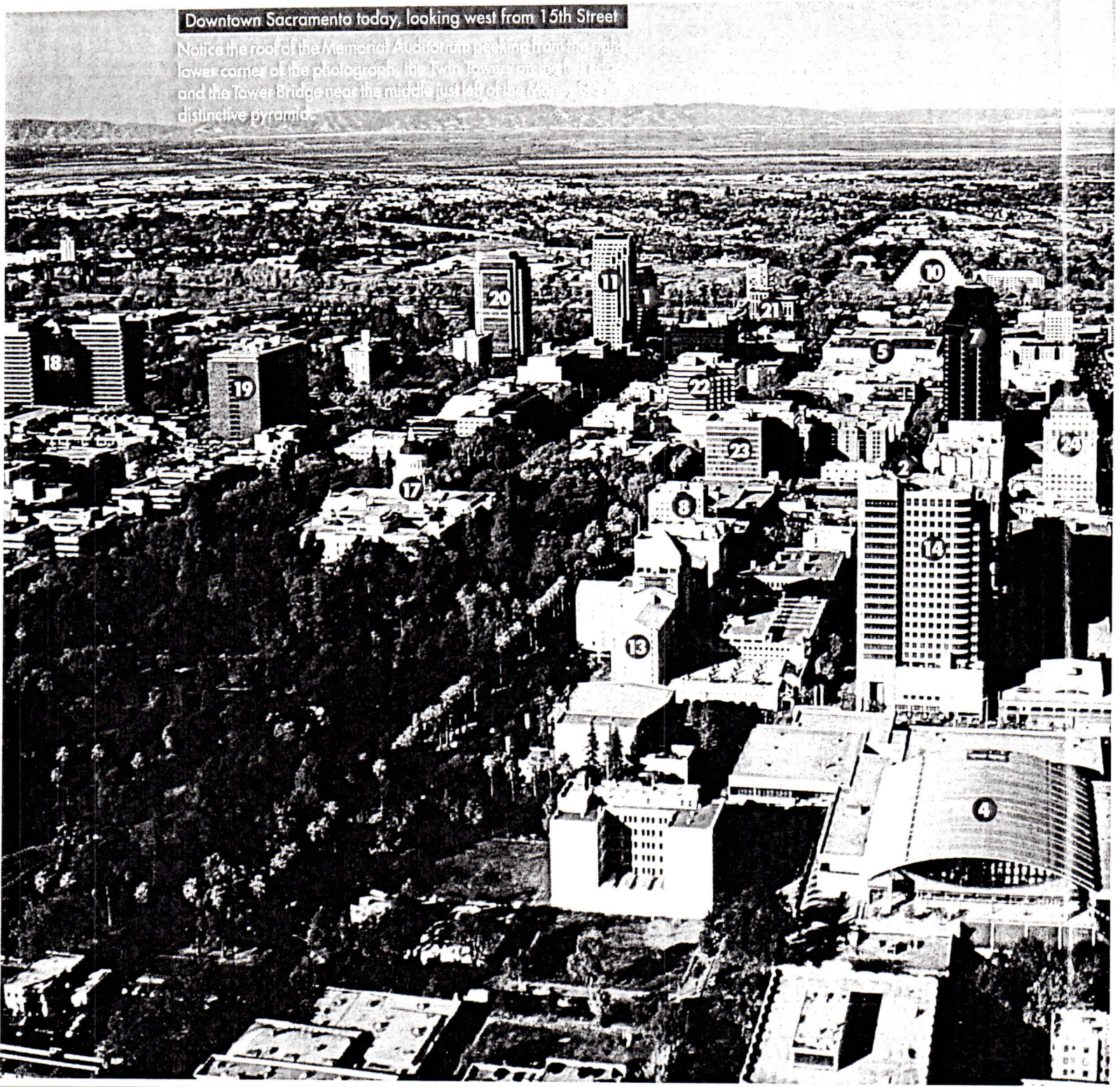
2. California Dental Association building (also known as the Ban Roll-On building), 1201 K St.—This 18-story building, with its distinctive domed top, was built in 1990 by developers Lankford & Cook. In 1993, the California Dental Association—which occupies 30 percent of the building and purchased 51 percent while it was still under construction—bought out Lankford. CDA paid \$49 million for the building, which cost \$39 million to build. In 1998, CDA filed suit over the building's mysterious window explosions, happening spontaneously and with no apparent explanation since 1991. Another major tenant was Restaurant 1201, a well-reviewed eatery that has nonetheless sparked jokes about whether a restaurant owned by dentists serves dessert or requires you to brush after your meal. The Broiler restaurant now occupies that site.

4. Convention Center, 14th and J streets—The Sacramento Convention Center was expanded in 1995 with an \$80 million addition: it is now 281,000 square feet and takes up two city blocks. The chief architect was Susan Wurdeman of Vitiello Associates, Inc., one of the few women nationwide to head this type of project. The design was especially sensitive to its surroundings: the arched stainless steel roof is sloped to avoid blocking the light to the stained glass windows of St. Paul's Episcopal Church next door. Yet here's a strange piece of trivia: after opening, visitors and city leaders complained of an odd—and completely inexplicable—taste to the water inside the building.

6. Cal-EPA Building, 1001 I St.—Slated to open later this year, the new headquarters for the California Environmental Protection Agency will be a 25-story building at the corner of 10th and I streets. City sources say that, like the Esquire Plaza building, Cal-EPA will feature a multicolored display of neon that will be a dramatic addition to Sacramento's nighttime skyline. The \$172 million project will also include several environmentally sensitive features, in part because of local criticism that the building wasn't "green" enough: photovoltaic cells on the roof—the largest array in the country—and increased window glazing.

Downtown Sacramento today, looking west from 15th Street

Notice the roof of the Memorial Auditorium peaking from the right lower corner of the photograph; the Twin Towers on the left; and the Tower Bridge near the middle just left of the Pyramid's distinctive pyramidal roof.



7. Renaissance Tower (also known as the Darth Vader building), 8th and K streets—The 28-story black glass tower—built in 1989 by the Benvenuti family—caused instant controversy with its modern and sharp-angled design. But whether you love it or hate it, there's no denying its dramatic presence on the Sacramento skyline: have your 4-year-old find it with nothing more to go on than the words "Darth Vader." It was the tallest building in Sacramento when it was built—it's now the second tallest. It has always been nearly fully leased—95 percent—and its biggest tenant is the State of California. KWOD 106.5FM also broadcasts from the 27th floor. Rumor has it the building is currently in escrow in the mid-\$50 million range, but RJB Interests, controlled by the Benvenutis, won't reveal the buyer.

8. Senator Hotel, 10th and L streets—The landmark, 75-year-old building across the street from the Capitol sold in September 1999 for \$33 million to Capital and Counties U.S.A. Inc., a San Francisco-based investment and development company that co-owns Ghirardelli Square. This is the fourth sale since 1979, when developer Buzz Oates purchased the neglected but historic hotel for \$2.5 million and renovated it—turning it into offices—at a cost of about \$15 million. It is perhaps best known as the place President Gerald Ford left before "Squeaky" Fromme tried to assassinate him in 1975 as he headed across Capitol Park to address the state legislature. Current tenants include a variety of attorneys, lobbying groups and reporters.

9. Lorenzo E. Patino Hall of Justice, 6th and I streets—This 83-year-old building—which is located across the street from the new Federal Courthouse—is currently undergoing a \$5 million renovation by local developer William McGregor and contractor John F. Otto. When the Sacramento city police headquarters moved out in 1997, there was some debate about the building's future until McGregor stepped in. Slated to be finished by December 2000, the restored building will house the Sacramento County Law Library, as well as offices for attorneys. It is on the National Register of Historic Places.



10. The Money Store, 3301 C St., West Sacramento—Located across the river from Sacramento, this dramatic golden pyramid—which is lit at night—makes a bold addition nonetheless to the downtown skyline. It was built in 1998 by Peter McCuen—the late Sacramento developer also responsible for the Central Library—and was sold for \$86 million to a subsidiary of The Bentley Forbes Group, Inc., of Los Angeles. The Money Store signed a 21-year lease for the 412,000-square-foot building and the 482,000-square-foot parking garage. With its fountains, lush landscaping and unparalleled views of the Sacramento River, it is also the cornerstone of West Sacramento's waterfront development.

12. Elks Tower, 11th and J streets—This 13-story building was designed by architect Leonard F. Starks in 1926, just one year after he did the Alhambra Theatre, the much-beloved art-deco movie house that is now a Safeway grocery store. Built at a cost of \$1.5 million, Elks Tower was originally both a hotel and the Elks lodge, but when the Elks moved out in the 1970s, the building fell into disrepair. A group of investors—headed by Buzz Oates—eventually purchased the property, renovated it, then sold it. Rumor has it that the U.S. Bank Plaza—attached to the Central Library—was built to mirror it in terms of colors, design and materials. In fact, the Elks Tower is considered by many to be the finest piece of architecture in Sacramento. The building currently leases office space; the ground floor tenant is Federal Express.

11. Wells Fargo Center (occasionally called "The Taj Mahal of the Capital"), 400 Capitol Mall—Currently the tallest building in Sacramento, this 30-story, 500,000-square-foot building recently became the object of the largest real estate transaction ever in the Sacramento region. In January, it sold for \$130 million to Cornerstone Properties, a New York-based investment firm. Although Wells Fargo will no longer own the property, the name will remain unchanged; the bank signed a long-term lease for 40,000 square feet. The gorgeous, marble-floored building was developed in 1992 by Wells Fargo and William Wilson & Associates, which later merged with Cornerstone Properties. Ninety-nine percent leased, major tenants include the bank and Il Fornaio Restaurant and Bakery on the ground floor.

13. Hyatt Regency Sacramento, 1209 L St.—Built in 1987, this 14-story building—with its lush lobby, pool area and topiary fencing—was considered downtown's first big-city hotel. Within walking distance of the Community Center, the Convention Center, the Capitol and Downtown Plaza, it was also integral to the city's plan to bring Sacramento into the major leagues of tourism—and when negotiations bogged down, local scuttlebutt credits Joseph Benvenuti with saving the deal. The hotel has 503 rooms and current restaurants on site include Ciao-Yama, which serves Japanese and Italian cuisine, and Dawson's, a San Francisco-style chophouse.

14. Esquire Plaza Office and IMAX Theatre Complex, 13th and J streets—The Esquire Plaza project includes a 22-story office tower and the IMAX Theatre, as well as what may be Sacramento's most notable landmark: a strip of electric blue neon that can be seen from passing airplanes and the trophy houses on Folsom Lake. Currently under construction is the Esquire Plaza Hotel, which, like the nearby Hyatt, will be within walking distance of downtown's main attractions. The major tenant of the office complex is the California Association of Hospitals and Health Systems, which owns the land and signed a lease in 1997 for 63,000 square feet—or four floors—of the new building. The IMAX Theatre, which opened last July, features a screen that is six stories high, 80 feet wide and uses 12,000 watts of digital sound—about three times that of an average theater. During the grand opening month, 50,000 people watched movies there.

15. Central Library/U.S. Bank Plaza, 8th and I streets—

The six-story, 162,000-square-foot library was built by Peter McCuen and opened in July 1992. At a cost of \$31.9 million, it was part of a redevelopment project that included an attached 24-story office building and parking garage. Residents and city leaders were delighted by many of the new library's features: room for 500,000 books, comfortable seating for 550 people, a special kids' area, a glass-ceilinged Galleria for special events and plans for a ground-floor café. But controversy arose almost immediately because of the building's limited hours. The building also became infamous shortly after opening when, in 1993, a gunman who killed two librarians was shot and killed on the library's roof.

16. New Federal Courthouse, 5th and I streets—This \$134 million project opened in January 1999 and was officially dedicated the following April, with such luminaries as U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony M. Kennedy—a Sacramento native—in attendance. The building itself is only

16 stories high, but it is 380,000 square feet, making it one of the largest buildings downtown. It is located on property owned by Southern Pacific, which donated the land as part of its plan to spur development of the abandoned 240-acre railyard. The courthouse is filled with \$842,000 of public

art, including Larry Kirkland's oversized gold-plated scales of justice in the rotunda.

17. State Capitol, 10th and L streets—On Jan. 4, 1982, the Capitol building was reopened after an eight-year, \$67 million restoration that was the state's chief project for the nation's bicentennial. During the restoration, the entire interior of the turn-of-the-20th-century building was gutted and rebuilt. The chief architect was Raymond Girvagian, who continued to urge legislators to protect and maintain the historic building. (Recently, for example, the Joint Rules Committee stopped the general services department from using cleaner that stained the marble floors and high-pressure hoses used to remove pigeon droppings—that were washing away the grout on the porticos.) In addition to the restored rooms, tourists also can see the famous official portrait of Gov. Jerry Brown—a postcard of this painting is reportedly one of the top souvenirs sold in the Capitol's basement gift shop.

18. Twin Towers

19. State Resources Agency

20. State Board of Equalization

21. One Capitol Mall

22. Union Bank Building

23. 925 L Street Building

24. 926 J Street Building

25. Pacific Bell

26. 1326 J Street Building

**27. Office of the Attorney General/
California Department of Justice**