

Message from President Mike Cotter

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SAN CLEMENTE, THE SPANISH VILLAGE



Ugly "modern" facades covered over historic Spanish Village in 1982.

The mission of the Historical Society is to unite all persons who are interested in the historical and cultural aspects of San Clemente, to foster greater community appreciation and identity, and to preserve and promote the heritage of San Clemente.

With that in mind, it's important to remember that Ole Hanson founded San Clemente in 1925 in order to create from scratch a "Spanish Village" - a city "in the manner of Old Spain." Hanson insisted that all buildings be of "Spanish type" - a style which later came to be called Spanish Colonial Revival.

This revival style became popular in the early 20th Century when architects were searching for a look that said "Southern California," which honored the state's Spanish colonial history, which worked in a subtropical climate, which would be different from "back east."

Hanson's Spanish Village vision was totally unique and spectacularly successful. By 1929, San Clemente was the wealthiest per capita City in the U.S. A 1932 Ripley's Believe It or Not article startled readers with the headline, "There is a SPANISH CITY in the U.S.A.!"

Unfortunately, San Clemente has at times grown tired of and rejected its "Spanish Village" soul: Hanson's building restrictions were abandoned in late 1930s.

In the 1960s and 70s, fabulous bluff-top red-tiled mansions were torn down in

without a soul - generic, dull, empty, lifeless.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT By RIPLEY



favor of nondescript high rise condos. Beige facades appeared on historic downtown buildings which said, "We're not Spanish - we're new and improved."

But it didn't work. The accompanying picture of San Clemente in 1982 shows the desolation of a façade town

Fortunately, a few years ago the City came to its senses and established an Architectural Overlay District for the historic downtown area which promotes historical preservation and requires new construction to be Spanish Colonial. This decision to rehabilitate and celebrate our Spanish Village heritage has paid off with the vibrant, quaint, cohesive and genuine "real town" experience visitors now get when they visit downtown.

Going forward, we can either embrace our downtown Spanish Village heritage, or we can reject it. From an economic point of view, what downtown has right now is a marketer's dream come true: A legitimate heritage with real charm literally oozing from its genuine 80-year-old patina. Downtown San Clemente has been studied by many cities nationwide for its "ideal downtown experience."

Today's shopping center developers spend many millions of dollars trying to re-create the exact atmosphere that too many of us take for granted.

Marketing experts would advise that throwing away what's unique about the downtown San Clemente experience would be shortsighted and dim-witted on a grand scale.