

Disney's Excellent Adventure

The mouse roars with a new theme park, retail and entertainment center, and hotel. *By Patrick Mott*

Slightly less than half a century ago, if you stood near the corner of what is now Katella Avenue and Harbor Boulevard in Anaheim and pirouetted in a circle, the view would have been pretty monotonous—orange groves and more orange groves. That was Anaheim then: a sleepy little town settled by immigrant German wine grape growers who eventually turned to cultivating citrus. Excitement? A Saturday night movie.

Then this guy named Disney showed up.

The story since then can be summed up in one word: Disneyland. But even Walt, the prime mover of the dream machine that saw Anaheim turned into a giant recreation and tourism capital, might not have envisioned what the Katella-Harbor locus has become.

That's because the company that bears its founder's name has been at it again. As of early 2001, Disneyland will have three significant next-door neighbors, all of which form what the company is calling "The Disneyland Resort," a sprawling all-day, all-night hybrid complex that includes a theme park, a retail, food and

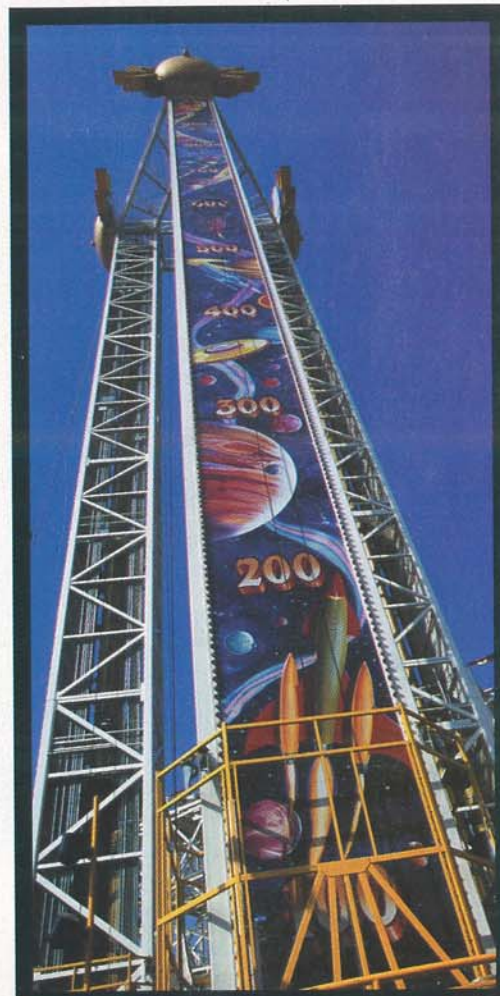
entertainment center, and a huge California-themed hotel.

"Disneyland will never be completed," said Walt Disney back when the park was born in 1955. This \$1.4 billion project proves it.

The centerpiece is Disney's California Adventure, which opens Feb. 8. Located on land that used to be Disneyland's sprawling parking lot, the 55-acre addition is intended to be a showcase of all things Californian (except, perhaps, earthquakes).

Some numbers: Disneyland cost \$17 million, about 1 percent the cost of California Adventure. "We practically spend on a bathroom what Walt spent on all of Disneyland," CEO Michael Eisner noted in the *Los Angeles Times*. California Adventure is 60 percent the size of Disneyland, yet admission will likely be the same.

Like Disneyland, Disney's California Adventure makes use of themed "lands": Paradise Pier, Hollywood Pictures Backlot and The Golden State. Paradise Pier



(Above) Thrill ride at Disney's California Adventure. (Below) Downtown Disney promises a true nightlife.



recalls the heyday of the great seaside amusement park piers, with thrill rides to match. The attractions and shows at Hollywood Pictures Backlot are pegged to the California history of films and entertainment, with its attendant cult of celebrity. The Golden State celebrates the state's wilderness areas and culture.

Disney planners want the addition to be "edgier" than the parent park. To that end, a pair of white-knuckle rides have been added: California Screamin', a genuine roller coaster—something new for Disney—in the Paradise Pier area, and nearby, an artfully constructed 110-foot-tall crag called Grizzly Peak that is home to a white-water rafting ride.

Among the larger attractions elsewhere are Muppet*Vision 3-D, a special effects movie experience with Kermit the Frog, Miss Piggy and the rest; and Pacific Wharf, a "workplace" area spotlighting California food and beverage products. Included are a sourdough bread-making facility, an agricultural exhibit area, a tortilla factory and a winery and tasting room developed in partnership with Robert Mondavi. Unlike Disneyland, alcohol will not be banned in the park.

The second of the trilogy of additions to The Disney Resort is the 750-room Grand Californian Hotel. The first Disney hotel to actually be located inside a theme park, the looming Grand Californian is built in the turn-of-the-century Craftsman style popular in Southern California. (It may also remind

some visitors of the Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite.)

Inspired by the arroyo craftsmen, mission pioneers and Plein Air school of painters, the hotel features 712 standard rooms, 34 "Artisan" suites, two vice-presidential suites and two presidential suites, as well as 20,000 square feet of meeting and banquet space and four restaurants.

The hotel is surrounded by a landscaped courtyard, manicured gardens, stone-lined pathways and shade trees, and has its own gate into Disney's California Adventure.

When the new hotel opens, the Disneyland Resort's hotel district will have more than 2,200 rooms.

Perhaps the most visible—and certainly most accessible—section of the new development will be Downtown Disney, opening Jan. 12, a non-gated pedestrian esplanade situated between the gates of Disneyland and California Adventure and the Disney hotels to the west. Open free to the public, the 300,000-square-foot Downtown Disney will feature themed dining and retail establishments, and offers something that Disneyland has always lacked: true nightlife.

Conceptually similar to the Universal CityWalk at Universal Studios Hollywood, Downtown Disney will be home to a handful of Southern California culinary and entertainment institutions (and a few from elsewhere): House of Blues, Rainforest Café, Ralph Brennan's Jazz Kitchen, Café Catal & Wine Bar, Naples Ristorante and Pizzeria, La Brea Bakery and the Disney-owned ESPN Zone sports bar.

"the biggest public-private partnership in U.S. history." Disney officials estimate that when the project is complete, Anaheim, Orange County, the State of California, various federal agencies and The Walt Disney Company will have spent \$4 billion on the resort and surrounding area. The revitalization of Anaheim and environs has been nothing short of dramatic: new palm-lined streets, re-paved walkways, themed streetlights, boulevard banners and landscaping featuring 15,000 flowers, plants and shrubs and some 4,000 trees including eucalyptus and California peppers.

All of which may make visitors want to do some exploring outside the immediate resort area, and perhaps the best direction to head, particularly for the sports-minded, is east. A few blocks in that direction are the Arrowhead Pond of Anaheim (home of the Mighty Ducks hockey team and also a special-events venue), Edison Field (home of the Anaheim Angels baseball team), and on the



Paradise Pier, one of the themed "lands" at California Adventure, recalls the heyday of the great seaside amusement park piers. White-knuckle rides such as California Screamin', a genuine roller coaster, are new for Disney.

Local residents wondered during construction where visitors' cars would go, since the new attractions are built on the space that used to be Disneyland's massive parking lot. The answer: the largest parking structure in North America. It provides parking for 10,250 vehicles, with surface parking available for 16,500 more. To accommodate increased traffic, new on-ramps and off-ramps have been added to the adjacent Interstate 5 freeway.

The project hardly exists in a vacuum. In fact, it involves what Disney has called

drawing board is Sportstown Anaheim, a dining and entertainment complex that includes the \$75 million Gotcha Glacier indoor water and snow sport park.

Taken collectively, the resort expansion and the facelift of the surrounding area is likely the most ambitious and wide-ranging local project since Disneyland was built in the early 1950s. As a result, the heart of Orange County—without a single original orange grove in sight—is expected to become one of the biggest visitor magnets on earth. **W**