



CONTINUED FROM PAGE I-1

some of the noble and notorious plans, projects and politicians it has raised high or exposed for public review.

Eight nondesigners who live, work and contribute to a sense of community in San Diego County evaluated and toured buildings and other projects nominated on several hundred public ballots before picking the most elegant of all, the 2000 Grand Orchid. The imposing, lavishly decorated St. Gregory the Great Catholic Church in Scripps Ranch received this heavenly award for its architecture, interior design and landscape architecture.

Proud history

The judges sent a strong message by bestowing Orchids on five historic preservation projects, all completed within the last year. Among these are prominent and beloved downtown San Diego landmarks: the El Cortez, a long-shuttered and decaying hotel now restored and converted into residences; the Courtyard By Marriott on Broadway, which gently transformed the splendid 1928 bank tower designed by William Templeton Johnson, a leading San Diego architect, for San Diego Trust & Savings; and the County Administration Center, a locally designed, federal Works Progress Administration success story that, by design, remains one of our finest civic celebrations of the union of city and bay.

The judges punctuated their pro-preservation message for today's hot-and-getting-hotter real estate market by hurling an Onion at the probably irreversible desecration of the old red-brick Riviera Hotel on Park Boulevard. Renamed eHotel by a new owner, the walls and even the windows were recently smothered in white paint and slapped with a monstrous, black letter "e" logo.

Other prizes from this year's winning crop reflect the promise and spirit of San Diego County. It's no coincidence that most of them were designed by a new generation of local design leaders, such as Carrier Johnson, Divan Studio, Luce et Studio and Hyndman & Hyndman, who are able to strut their stuff now that the economy is strong.

Those of us who believe architecture and design provide a measure of regional and urban character can now joyously claim a growing number of supremely sophisticated, Orchid-winning buildings and landscapes in our midst.

Nokia's two new office and research buildings create a commanding presence overlooking I-15, but the Finnish company's best effort to express its heritage and creativity lies in the buildings' Finnish-influenced interiors and classic Finnish furnishings designed by Alvar Aalto.

Downtown, near an entrance to the Gaslamp Quarter, a new Hilton hotel with intimately scaled public areas shows flashes of design brilliance and imagination that are proving memorable to San Diegans out for a drink or a meal and visitors alike.

Then there's the exuberant side of San Diego, which the jury recognized with an Orchid for a super skateboard park in Ocean Beach. Healthy social concerns took root in a special Orchid to a well-designed, affordable housing cluster in Carlsbad.



Onion

Big and boxy new stores along Washington Street in Hillcrest friendly walking territory and has lost its individuality and hu

ners from the last quarter-century offers a fascinating, if nonscientific, record of San Diego growth patterns, community priorities, political skirmishes and changing needs sparked by influxes of new residents, businesses and institutions.

You can almost track county development — embellishments and encroachments alike — from year to year, decade to decade with an Orchids & Onions score card of all 25 years. During the first 10 years, for example, many Orchids & Onions were found in places undergoing the most change: the Gaslamp Quarter, Pacific Beach, La Jolla and Hillcrest.

Today, available land and money for new buildings and redevelopment are concentrated in North County, the middle of the county and downtown. An Orchid to a healing garden at Children's Hospital and Onions to a Mira Mesa multiscreen theater and a San Marcos medical office reflect this trend.

As seen through the Orchids & Onions lens, fertile and fallow fields that produced past successes and disasters may also help guide us into the future.

But who among us is, or was, qualified to assess design excellence or the long-range impact of development vs. open space on people and the environment?

For the program's first 17 years, local design-

