

2016 GOVERNOR'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS

California Theatre



Courtesy of Finger Photography

The California Theatre is a cornerstone of the New York Landing Historic District in Old Town Pittsburg, California. It was designed by architect A.W. Cornelius in a classic revival style and constructed by Sylvester and Salvatore Enea in 1920. The theater became an elegant landmark for Pittsburg, showing the best in vaudeville acts, silent movies accompanied by pipe organ, and later, films from the golden era of Hollywood.

The California Theatre closed in 1954, and steadily deteriorated through decades of neglect. Citizens, local theater groups, and merchants urged that the building be saved. In 1994 the City of Pittsburg conducted a cleanup and stabilization of the theater. Due to extremely high costs, no further improvements were made until 2006 when funding assistance was received from the Redevelopment Agency of the City of Pittsburg (Agency). Rehabilitation of the theater met the goals of Agency plans to improve the quality of the downtown area, and promote the area as the social, cultural, and entertainment center of the community.

The City and the Agency were sensitive to the historical significance of the structure, and hired a team of consultants, artisans, and skilled tradesmen to tackle the many rehabilitation challenges. The building was seismically retrofitted, and mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems upgraded. By conducting community outreach, City staff received valuable information

about the theatre's historical interior design and artwork. Light fixtures, handrails, and a tiled drinking fountain in the lobby were faithfully restored. Restoration artist Beate Bruhl recovered or recreated artwork in the entryway, balcony, and auditorium. With community input about desired theater amenities, the City Council approved additional funds for completion of the stage, installation of seating in the main theatre, and other improvements. The curtain rose once again at the California Theatre in January 2013.

Today the theater is home to the Pittsburg Community Theatre troupe, comedy shows, dance performances, films, and other community events. A booklet was created chronicling the restoration process, and community members' memories about the theatre were recorded on video. The California Theatre project stands as testament to the community's determined commitment to preserve its collective heritage.

Learn more about the California Theatre: <http://www.pittsburgcaliforniatheatre.com/about/>