

# Rebirth and Renewal

## A Priceless Treasure in Peril

A century ago a proud small city (5,000) and county (20,000) built this courthouse for \$269,000 (worth \$6.3 million in 2013) and its jail annex in 1932 for \$450,000. But seismic safety concerns closed first the courthouse in 1969 and then its annex in 1981 as their replacements, a new Ventura County Government Center, opened on Victoria Avenue. To save this priceless downtown complex from demolition, the City of San Buenaventura (Ventura) purchased, restored and reopened the courthouse as City Hall in 1974 and the Annex as City Hall West in 1988. The conversion from courthouse to city hall by Fisher & Wilde made Ventura a leader in preserving downtowns rich in California history and period architecture: it meticulously restored the terra cotta façade,



Scaffolds cover the "Future City Hall" c. 1971  
Photo courtesy of the Ventura City Archives



Ventura City Hall 2013  
Photo by Karen Moser

**What's it Worth in 2013?**

**1913 Courthouse**  
\$269,000 = \$6.3 million

**1974 Restoration**  
\$2.9 million = \$14 million

**1932 Annex**  
\$450,000 = \$7.7 million

**1988 Restoration**  
\$11 million = \$22 million

Teller's Cage: Treasury Offices received a vintage restoration in 2012

marble facings, ornate plaster ceilings and fine woodwork; replaced plumbing, electrical and airflow systems; and seismically reinforced the existing steel frame and concrete foundation with new interior walls and inside foundations.



The seismic upgrade entailed peeling brick walls of their marble facings to add steel rebar and gunnite (air-blown concrete) shown here in the vestibule by entrance gates. c. 1971  
Photo courtesy of the Ventura City Archives

## Council Chambers & Other Courtrooms

As Bruce Archibik and Ron West of Cannel & Chaffin transformed the Superior Courtroom into the new Council Chambers, they preserved its richly paneled walls, plaster ceilings and three Tiffany-style starburst stained-glass domes depicting the scales, sword and law book of justice, a gift from the architect. Another stained-glass ceiling adorns the handsome Community Meeting Room, former courtroom for the Justice of the Peace. Plaster law books and scrolls adorn the vault of the third and smallest cherry wood paneled courtroom in City Hall West, now called the Santa Cruz Room.

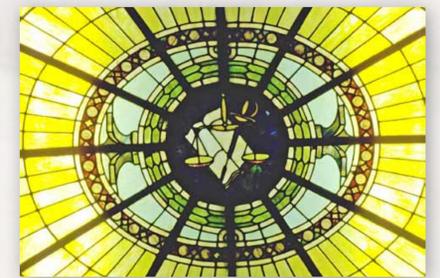


Photo by Donna Granata



Council Chambers



Santa Cruz Room Frieze

Display curated by Cynthia Thompson, Historian  
[www.the-history-studio.com](http://www.the-history-studio.com)