

# WHEN THE OLD



May Company, and the mall, drew crowds when it opened in 1969  
(photo courtesy of Carlsbad History Collection)

Our original mall is in the midst of transformation as

# IS NEW AGAIN



The new look of the mall's exterior (photo by Taylor Mohr)

The Shoppes at Carlsbad continues to take shape.

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**What's your why? What's your wow?** These are the first questions business consultants want to know because it's what customers want to feel. The Shoppes at Carlsbad is answering these in ways that seem the same as malls everywhere, feels a tad the same to longtime residents, but is as different as Carlsbad.

### PLAZA CAMINO REAL

We need a mall in Carlsbad! Believe it or not, we used to say this back in the 1960s, after the Sears Roebuck catalog years and before the Internet. Sure, we had TG&Y and Stillman's and Stringer's small businesses in the Village, but as suburbia expanded the new trend was shopping in a centralized spot. Plaza Camino Real met that need in 1969.

It opened with a lot of fanfare, with JCPenney and the May Company as anchor stores. It grew in the next decade to more than 1 million square feet of retail space and the county's first multiplex theater across Marron Road. It was the largest mall in the county until the Fashion Valley Mall expansion of the early '80s.

Needs change over time and businesses must change, too, if they don't want to end up in an encyclopedia next to cassette tapes and dot-matrix printers. Though it opened in mid-century, Plaza Camino Real was designed in Spanish hacienda style. Now we are in a whole new century as the mall settles into a new mid-century style.

### A MALL SHOOK UP

The Shoppes at Carlsbad is now owned by Brookfield Properties. The original owners were May Centers. The mall was bought by Westfield in 1994. While Westfield stalled its remodel in Carlsbad in order to finish UTC's upgrade in La Jolla, the Caruso Company proposed a new mall at the Carlsbad Strawberry fields. This caused an existential crisis for Carlsbadians. This time it wasn't, "We need a mall!" It was, "Do we need another mall?" By this point, The Forum Carlsbad in

south Carlsbad and Carlsbad Premium Outlets at Car Country had already been established here for years.

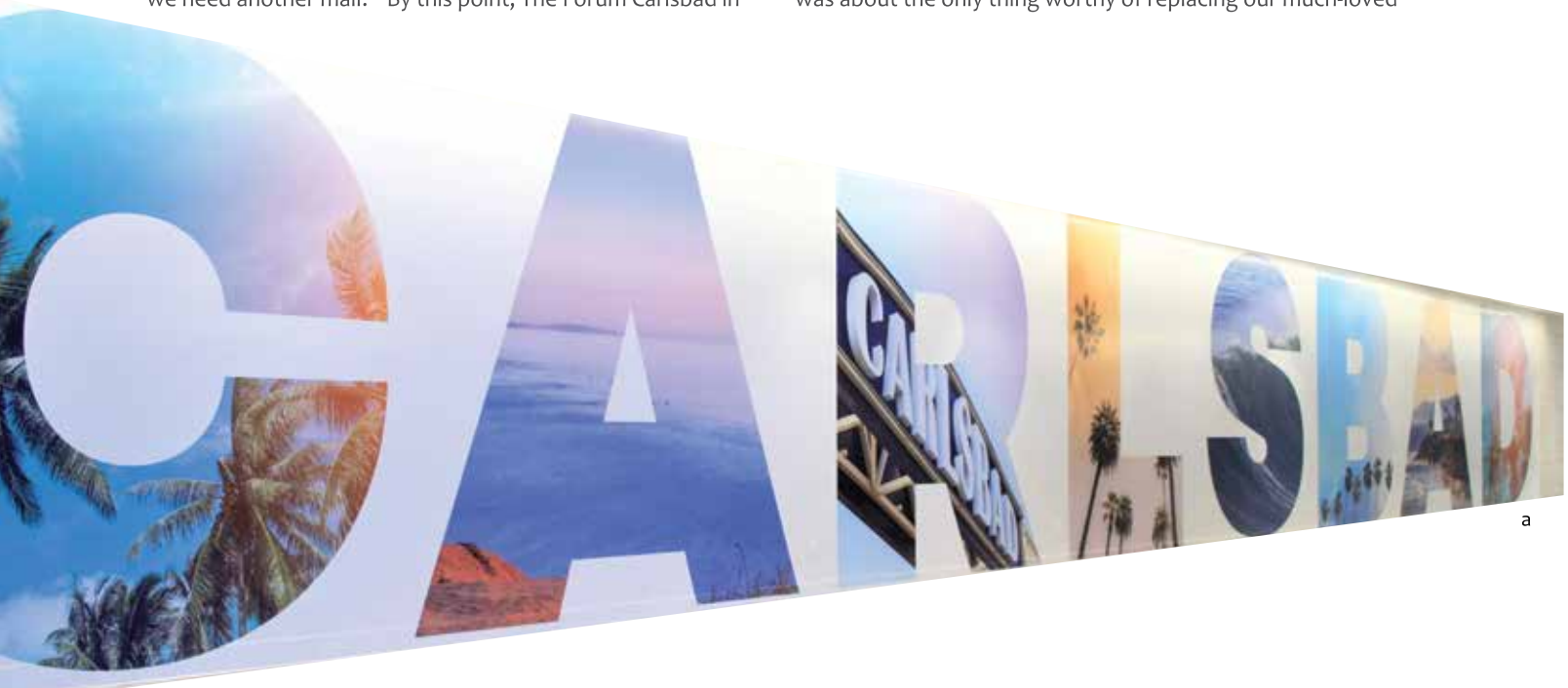
This led to a bit of a Carlsbad kerfuffle. Caruso was voted out. Westfield sold the Carlsbad mall to Rouse Properties and in February 2016, Rouse agreed to be bought by an affiliate of Brookfield Asset Management Inc. and acquired the entire portfolio of 35 regional malls and retail centers in 21 states. Though Brookfield wasn't involved in the brouhaha, it certainly benefited from it. What Carlsbad wanted in a mall had been studied, discussed at town halls and debated between friends and neighbors. All Brookfield had to do was read the notes.

### THE SHOPPES, RESTAURANTS AND ENTERTAINMENT AT CARLSBAD

Ken Gray, Brookfield's director of marketing for The Shoppes at Carlsbad, says, "I'm a Carlsbad guy. It's important to have the center have the personality of Carlsbad." Though the latest mall trend is to wow with gilt and glitter, Brookfield thought The Shoppes should have a casual, beach town vibe. The signs look like beach glass and the ambiance is quite Carlsbad.

Gray understands that every place has its own culture. "Online shopping has definitely affected the way people shop but customers still like the ability to touch and feel purchases before buying. Amazon's limited brick-and-mortar stores in 23 states don't replace the in-person effect for a number of shoppers," he says. "The most successful online retailers have a physical store, making for easier returns, no postage fees and additional browsing." Plus, there are some things you can't buy online such as a nice meal out or going to the movies with friends.

Dining and entertainment bring in more people than shopping alone. Many of us saw our first "Star Wars" film in the twinplex in the summer of '77 and our eighth in a reserved recliner at the new Regal 12-plex. The Cheesecake Factory was about the only thing worthy of replacing our much-loved







a

“IT’S LIKE WE HAVE OUR OWN RESTAURANT ROW,” GRAY SAYS.



b



c



a) The team behind Señor Grubby's ventured into a different type of cuisine with Grubby's Poke & Fish Market; b) the Yard House recently opened at the mall; c) Islands is part of the mall's diverse group of restaurants; d) homegrown Carlsbad company Leap Coffee opened an outpost at the mall; e) popular taco shop Luche Libre has also joined the lineup of new dining options (photos by Taylor Mohr).



Pat & Oscar's. Los Angeles-based Wokcano and Texas de Brazil Steak House are coming soon. San Diego-based Lucha Libre Taco Shop grabs all your senses and is now here if you are craving a Half Nelson Enchilada or a Smackdown Quesadilla. Dave & Busters offers dining and entertainment in one spot. You can eat pretzel dogs and watch hoops at the game bar, or down a signature flame-grilled burger before you virtually escape Jurassic Park.

There is, of course, a special affection for our homegrown Carlsbad businesses. Islands is Hawaii influenced, but at home in its Carlsbad headquarters. Best known for its burgers, the beach bowls and salads will fill you up after a long morning session. The Wiqui Waqui is a fave.

Carlsbadian Leap Coffee is also at The Shoppes. Get the Sweet Cheeks House Espresso to start your day or get your favorite coffee lover some Malawi-Women's Co-op. Wanting to avoid a stare down with Lucha Libre, Señor Grubby's decided to explore new culinary options besides tacos. It's now parked next door as Grubby's Poke & Fish Market. One O'sider said, "Their poke is so good! I drive out of my way for the Spicy Surf 'n' Turf."

"It's like we have our own Restaurant Row," Gray says. "We also do local pop-up shops in unleased spots. Carlsbad Gourmet and Stone

Brewery come every holiday season."

### THE MALL OF MAÑANA

While The Shoppes at Carlsbad is still in the pardon-our-dust phase, it does not have the where-is-everybody sensation that was there during the Caruso kerfuffle. Local art has helped this tremendously. The Shoppes chose to bring in a denizen of the Village and Carlsbad champion of public art, Bryan Snyder, as curator of its art program. Paintings that were done live in front of shoppers are still on display at the east end of the mall as the second story gets refurbished.

One longtime Carlsbad resident walked into one of the anchor stores and said, "That tile has been there since 1974." Many people ask about the anchors. Macy's, JCPenney and Sears own the buildings they occupy and so any upgrade has to come through those companies. In the meantime, these mainstays have been joined by of-the-moment, fast-fashion retailers such as Zara, H&M, Windsor and Forever 21.

The remodel is progressing, but in an industry of continual flux, the end is never in sight. New is good and old is comforting. The Shoppes at Carlsbad are same, same, but different.