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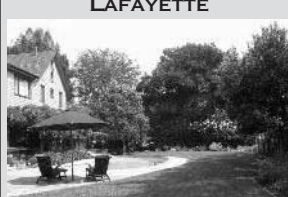
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Lafayette Mercantile, Urban Esthetics Serve Prime Retail Space
By Sophie Braccini



View of the Mercantile weather vane and decorative stars Photo SZFM design studio

Sudhish Mohindroo's primary focus when conceiving the architecture of the Lafayette Mercantile was how the building would integrate within the framework of public space. Cortese Investment, the owner of the building, hired SZFM Design Studio, the firm owned by Mohindroo and his partner Eric Maltman. Both Mohindroo and Cortese share the same vision of urban design, the creation of a sense of timeless harmony that pleases the eye and encourages high levels of foot traffic.

The new building had to blend in with its surroundings while adding to its dynamic. The Lafayette Mercantile sits on the sidewalks between Lafayette Circle and Mt Diablo Blvd and when looking at it from across the street, one notices that the left side is stronger and more prominent than the right. That was done to produce a continuum with the neighboring structures and create a feel of integration.

The building's harmony is strengthened by the timeless and elegant design selected for the structure. "The ground floor and the

upper ones are two different animals," says Mohindroo, "the upper floors, where offices will be located, provides the classical frame that will support the creativity and life brought by the retailers at the street level. They will express their personalities, within the guidelines of the general concept." And Mohindroo's company will be there for those storeowners who need a hand to complete their "boutique" presentation.

By the same token, Mohindroo is involved in the choice of retailers that are going to populate the Mercantile. "We are creating a place where shopping will happen, and where people will have the desire to linger, take a walk, or have a drink by the fountain," explains the architect. Cortese Investment, known for its careful choice of retailers, had already hired SZFM design studio to renovate the very successful "La Fiesta Square" a few blocks East of the Mercantile.

But where La Fiesta Square was a project involving primarily the renovation of existing buildings, the Mercantile had to face the complete transformation of a space:

a gas station was in operation at that corner. Cortese Investment needed the help of the city to succeed. In order to secure local support, the developer offered to open for free to the public the entire underground parking space, after 6 pm.

As a result, the Mercantile should quickly become an essential component of Lafayette's day and night life. The building's appearance will play a role in the success of the center in the larger community. Mohindroo explains how it has been enhanced by the attention paid to details. For example, the back of the building, where outside parking will be provided for shoppers, is being decorated with locally hand made ceramic tiles that hold one of the recurrent decorative fixtures of the Mercantile: stars. This timeless and symbolic motif is found as a weather vane on the building's roof, which connects it to the sky, as well as at the bottom of the fountain in the form of starfish, connecting the ensemble with the sea and the earth.

This cosmic and harmonic view of space is part of the long term and sustainable vision for the Mercantile. The main street side of the building faces north: a good natural lighting opportunity, while simultaneously keeping the structure cool. The large windows create a balance between glass and wall that's both esthetically pleasing and energy efficient.

Craig Semmelmeier, Principal of Main Street Property Services which leases the retail space, believes the appeal of the building drives the success it has met with

tenants. As of the end of September, he indicated that 90% of the retail space was already allocated, with tenants such as Powell's Sweet Shoppe, Misto Lino, Yankee Pier, JoS A. Bank and Lavande Nail Spa. Two spaces, of 1300sq and 833sqf, are still available.

Rick Steffens of Grubb & Ellis, the company in charge of renting the office space, says the

2nd floor is almost entirely rented, with 2800sqf left, and 9000 sqf is available on the 3rd floor. That's about a third of the total 32000sqf of the building's office space and Steffens claims there are letters of intent for the remaining openings.

Steffens believes the high interest in the building is due to the quality of the construction, its amenities and convenience,

"Lafayette needed a business building to take pride in," says the Senior Vice President, "we are looking forward to the second week in October when the first tenants move in." The building will harbor a mix of Financial and Health Care professional, including the recently incorporated California Bank of Commerce, which will set its headquarters in the Mercantile.

Lamorinda Home Sales continued



LAFAYETTE	Last reported: 12
LOWEST AMOUNT:	\$700,000
HIGHEST AMOUNT:	\$1,780,000
MORAGA	Last reported: 4
LOWEST AMOUNT:	\$546,000
HIGHEST AMOUNT:	\$1,171,000
ORINDA	Last reported: 5
LOWEST AMOUNT:	\$700,000
HIGHEST AMOUNT:	\$910,000

Home sales are compiled by Cal Resource, an Oakland real estate information company. Sale prices are computed from the county transfer tax information shown on the deeds that record at close of escrow and are published five to eight weeks after such recording. This information is obtained from public county records and is provided to us by California Resource. Neither Cal Resource nor this publication are liable for errors or omissions.

- LAFAYETTE**
- 890 Birdhaven Court, \$1,780,000, 4 Bdrms, 2725 SqFt, 1952 YrBlt, 8-31-07
 - 418 Castello Road, \$833,000, 3 Bdrms, 1801 SqFt, 1954 YrBlt, 9-12-07
 - 991 Condit Road, \$1,115,000, 3 Bdrms, 2205 SqFt, 1955 YrBlt, 8-31-07
 - 6 Gilmore Court, \$875,000, 3 Bdrms, 1755 SqFt, 1954 YrBlt, 8-31-07
 - 1014 Hampton Road, \$1,085,000, 3 Bdrms, 2769 SqFt, 1947 YrBlt, 9-13-07
 - 3650 Happy Valley Road, \$1,685,000, 5 Bdrms, 2876 SqFt, 1949 YrBlt, 9-7-07
 - 172 Haslemere Court, \$700,000, 3 Bdrms, 1638 SqFt, 1988 YrBlt, 8-31-07
 - 970 Janet Lane, \$765,000, 3 Bdrms, 1119 SqFt, 1950 YrBlt, 9-13-07
 - 857 Mountain View Drive, \$1,309,000, 3 Bdrms, 3782 SqFt, 1995 YrBlt, 8-31-07
 - 365 Shire Oaks Court, \$1,350,000, 4 Bdrms, 3031 SqFt, 1965 YrBlt, 8-31-07
 - 3149 Stanwood Lane, \$1,232,000, 3 Bdrms, 2260 SqFt, 1959 YrBlt, 9-4-07
 - 1212 Sunset Loop, \$959,500, 4 Bdrms, 1634 SqFt, 1950 YrBlt, 9-11-07"
- MORAGA**
- 48 Corte De Rosa, \$869,000, 4 Bdrms, 1725 SqFt, 1977 YrBlt, 9-13-07
 - 272 Draeger Drive, \$1,171,000, 4 Bdrms, 2216 SqFt, 1973 YrBlt, 9-12-07
 - 134 Miramonte Drive, \$546,000, 2 Bdrms, 1514 SqFt, 1965 YrBlt, 9-14-07
 - 100 Walford Drive, \$950,000, 5 Bdrms, 2340 SqFt, 1963 YrBlt, 9-14-07
- ORINDA**
- 115 Bates Court, \$725,000, 9-12-07
 - 51 Camino Don Miguel, \$700,000, 5 Bdrms, 2316 SqFt, 1954 YrBlt, 9-11-07
 - 25 Crescent Drive, \$780,000, 3 Bdrms, 1214 SqFt, 1962 YrBlt, 9-12-07
 - 201 El Toyonal Road, \$850,000, 3 Bdrms, 1408 SqFt, 1953 YrBlt, 9-6-07
 - 297 Glorietta Boulevard, \$910,000, 2 Bdrms, 1467 SqFt, 1948 YrBlt, 9-7-07

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