

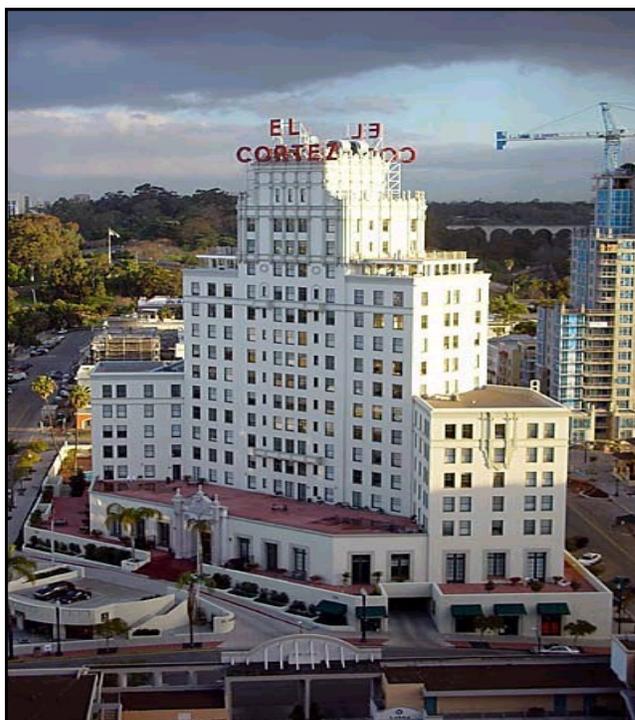
Historic Hotels!

XXXII: San Diego's *El Cortez Hotel*

Sitting atop the rise on Seventh Avenue and Ash Street, the El Cortez Hotel no longer dominates the neighborhood known as Cortez Hill with a "commanding beauty" that distinguished it as San Diego's "finest" furnished apartment-hotel when it opened Thanksgiving 1927.

Guests of the El Cortez enjoyed lavish interiors of Renaissance styles in their personal rooms, that included "beautiful walnut furniture," the finest quality of Irish linens, damask and tapestry hangings, and fine rugs laid over plush lining, and dramatic lamps. The specially-designed furniture in the public rooms exuded wealth as well as romance. Tapestries hung at the windows in the lounge while "very beautiful hand-blocked linen in blue, old gold and raspberry shades" covered the main dining room's windows. Indeed, each visitor to the El Cortez was greeted at the entrance by a "dashing young caballero, attired in black, with a sash of brilliant red and yellow and a broad-brimmed velvet hat," who threw open the great door with a flair equal to his costume. No matter if one passed by the doorman only occasionally or daily on their way to their furnished apartment, the effect of his costume and demeanor certainly contributed to the enchanting ambiance of the establishment.

Known for the spectacular 360o view, Sky Room patrons could enjoy ocean sunsets along with their martinis on a clear night through 70 percent glass exterior walls. Stylish decor included an art deco, Lucite "extravaganza" above its elliptical-shaped bar. To eliminate a smoky atmosphere, a modern air conditioning system completely changed the air every four minutes. Soon after its opening, the Sky Room became the social gathering place for fashionable San Diegans.



As the tallest building in San Diego, the El Cortez could offer its visitors breath-taking retreats, but that height served a completely different purpose after December 7, 1941 when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. That night, "Marines surrounded the hotel with fixed bayonets to protect high officials," securing the hotel as a point of military operation.

Although empty for 20 years, \$23 million was spent to convert the old hotel into 85 apartments, and the El Cortez opened fully renovated in 2000.