

Expanding Disney's California Adventure: Details on the Big Makeover

by Dave Marx, PassPorter Guidebooks Author

Disney's California Adventure is due for a big makeover! On Wednesday, October 17, 2007, the Walt Disney Company announced a \$1.2 billion re-theming and expansion of Disney's California Adventure theme park at the Disneyland Resort in Anaheim California. Rumors of a makeover have been circulating for quite a while, but the rumors didn't measure-up to the reality/fantasy announced by Disney Company CEO and President Bob Iger and Disney Parks and Resorts Chairman Jay Rasulo (in this case a President does outrank a Chairman).

Disney Imagineers have dipped into their deep bag of tricks and tried-and-true concepts for this project, which will add a 12-acre land themed on Disney/Pixar's 2006 hit animated film, *Cars*, a total of eight new attractions including the previously announced Toy Story Midway Mania (due to open in 2008), a *Cars*-inspired road race, a Little Mermaid dark ride, and a huge nighttime music, water, and lights extravaganza (think: *Fantasmic!* on steroids). Several attractions will fall by the wayside, the park's entry plaza will be totally revamped, mealtime offerings will be stepped up... by the time the project is complete in around 2012 nearly every part of the park will have been touched by the project.

Returning (we hope reverently) to Walt Disney's original Disneyland concept, Imagineers will replace the park's entry plaza and Sunshine Plaza with a new Walt Disney Plaza, a main street modeled on the California that Walt Disney encountered in the late 1920s when he moved there from Kansas City, Missouri. This is just across the Esplanade from the Main Street inspired by Walt's turn-of-the-century youth in Marceline, Missouri. Park hoppers will experience something of a Pilgrim's Progress as they move from Disneyland to California Adventure. Overall, the notion seems to be, "Since Disneyland fans love Walt's creation so much, let's see how much 'Walt' we can put into Disney's California Adventure." In the new plaza we'll find a new, interactive rendition of "The Walt Disney Story," housed in a replica of the Carthay Circle Theatre, where "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" premiered. Walt Disney World fans will recognize the Carthay Circle -- a smaller version houses a shop on Sunset Boulevard at Disney's Hollywood Studios. The new building will stand just outside the gates of the Hollywood Pictures Backlot (and segue nicely into that movie

theme), and is intended to be a major park icon, which is what Graumann's Chinese Theater/Great Movie Ride used to be for Disney's Hollywood Studios before someone plunked a huge, blue hat in front of it -- ironic, isn't it? So, Walt Disney fans on pilgrimage will have to visit Disney's California Adventure, no matter what. Main Street Vehicles will be represented by Pacific Electric "Red Car" trolleys (shades of 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit!'). The Golden Gate Bridge will fall (it wasn't there when Walt arrived), the big CALIFORNIA mosaic/sign will be shattered (too modern), and the golden sun sculpture and adjoining fountains will permanently set in the west. Naturally, new shops and eateries will rise from the ashes. From the artist's rendering and photos of a 3-D model, we get the impression of a cross between Disney's Hollywood Studios Hollywood Boulevard/Sunset Boulevard area, and Knott's Berry Farm's Ghost Town (an aspect of old-time California that was still in evidence when Walt arrived).

All Disney has to say about Hollywood Pictures Backlot is that it will be home to, among other things, special ticketed events (a new use for the wonderful Hyperion Theater?), and the Golden State area will be home to new dining experiences. Golden State is also home to the Preview Area (Blue Sky Cellar) that spotlights the park's makeover8.

Farther into the park, Golden Dreams, starring Whoopi Goldberg, will crash to give way to a new Little Mermaid attraction. Descriptions are currently vague, but we get the impression from the press release and artist's rendering that it will be a cutting edge dark ride visiting favorite scenes and songs from the film that resurrected Disney's animation fortunes in the '90s. We suspect Imagineers will be drawing on the technology and storytelling seen in Epcot's The Seas with Nemo and Friends' Clammobile ride and Disneyland's new Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage. This will be combined with a kid-friendly play area; yet another "Ariel's Grotto" (Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom has one, Disneyland Park has a grotto on the site of the old Monsanto House of the Future, and let's not forget Ariel's Grotto Restaurant right in Disney's California Adventure, but who's counting?)

Next door to Golden Dreams, in the Paradise Pier section, Disney will expand and redevelop the area surrounding Paradise Bay to accommodate crowds of up to 9,000 for Disney's World of Color (we hope it will be Wonderful), a nighttime extravaganza whose Disney-supplied artist's rendering looks remarkably like Fantasmic!, with Steamboat Willie replacing Sorcerer Mickey at the center of the action. Of course, we can depend on Imagineering to pull out the technical and storytelling stops on this one. It does make us wonder, though ... if they want 9,000 people viewing this every night, will they also be running Fantasmic! in competition to it? Somehow, we doubt it.

At Paradise Pier (and at Disney's Hollywood Studios in Orlando, for that matter), Toy Story Mania already opened to huge success. Toy Story Mania a souped-up version of the Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters/Space Ranger Spin concept, but this time there are multiple arcade games played during the ride rather than just one laser shoot-'em-up, and Buzz, Zurg, and the Little Green Men are joined by a boxful of other Toy Story characters.

Off in what is now the Timon parking lot to the left of Paradise Pier and beyond A Bug's Land and the Pacific Wharf dining complex will be Cars Land, inspired by the animated film. Three new attractions are promised, with just one, the e-ticket "Radiator Springs Racers" described in the press releases (all they say is that Luigi and Mater factor in the other two rides). We suspect Radiator Springs Racers will borrow ride technology from Epcot's Test Track and/or Disneyland's Indiana Jones Adventure to simulate a rip-roarin' Nascar-style race. Like Test Track, it will start slowly and accelerate steadily from there. Renderings suggest that ride vehicles will race side-by-side on adjoining tracks. With the demise of the Timon parking lot and the anticipated additional visitation to the park, we've also got to expect an additional high-rise parking structure somewhere, or the expansion of the huge Mickey & Friends structure.

More PassPorter Photos of Disney's California Adventure Reports in the LA newspapers and at sites like MiceAge.com and Screamscape.com carry additional detail, information, and (perhaps) rumor, such as the eventual redevelopment of Muppet*Vision 3D into Mickey's Philharmagic (the sterling 3-D film from Walt Disney World's Fantasyland), and that the other attractions in Cars Land may be "Luigi's Roamin' Tires" (a revamped version of Disneyland's flying saucer hovercraft of yesteryear), and "Mater's Junkyard Jamboree," a spinning ride. The new land may also include a restaurant remarkably similar to Sci-Fi Dine-In Theater at Disney's Hollywood Studios. The Sun Wheel at Paradise Pier lost the sun and gained a mouse's face in its place, while California Screamin' lost its head! Other existing Paradise Pier attractions will get similarly Disney-branded, and has oft been reported, Mailboomer could also going away.

All these changes are supposed to take place between now and 2012. When you add them to other announcements and changes made -- an expansion of Disneyland Resort's Grand Californian Hotel including the West Coast's first Disney Vacation Club villas (now open); the new Disney hotel/vacation club resort in Hawaii (Aulani, due to open in fall 2011); and the two, new ships for Disney Cruise Line (sailing in 2011 and 2012), we here at PassPorter have a whole lot of work cut out for us, and you have a whole lot of new Disney vacation experiences to look

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forward to.

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