

At historic Los Angeles theater, the show will go on

New tenant will maintain the Mayan as a downtown nightlife destination



The new tenant at the Mayan Theatre, which dates to the 1920s, will reopen it and keep it as a nightclub. (CoStar)

By Maggie Bavalack

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The Mayan Theatre, a landmark of downtown Los Angeles, is getting a makeover and a shot at its second century in the entertainment business.

The Mayan, which opened in August 1927 as a venue for musical comedies, most recently spent 35 years as a nightclub, and its new tenant plans to again bring performers to the nightclub stage. Chade Joher, owner and managing partner of the club through Historic Society Holdings LLC, said a new high-end sound system, lighting, dance floor and other upgrades are going in now so the club can open for New Year's Eve, then close for a few weeks for more work before opening for good.

Joher said what won't change are the ornate carvings and other design elements that make the Mayan a designated city landmark; the work will blend the theater's historic charm with contemporary design and amenities. The Mayan was designed by Stiles O. Clements of Morgan, Walls & Clements and features intricate pre-Columbian motifs by sculptor Francisco Cornejo — his most celebrated work. The venue's ornate Mayan Revival style includes the Hall of Feathered Serpents lobby, an auditorium chandelier inspired by the Aztec calendar stone and a fire curtain adorned with lush jungle and temple imagery.



In its most recent incarnation as a nightclub, the Mayan kept its ornate design elements.
(Mike Hume/Historic Theatre Photos)

The 20,741-square-foot property has a capacity of about 1,700 people, Joher said, about double that of his Heat Nightclub in Anaheim. Joher said the family has been in the nightclub business since his father opened his first club in 1986, and when the Mayan's previous tenant announced over the summer that it would close in September, the Johers jumped in. "The opportunity came quick, and we were able to execute the lease," he said.

The city of Los Angeles also moved quickly, Joher said, granting all the necessary approvals and making the process "fairly easy" as it prioritizes revitalizing downtown LA. He said he expects the state liquor license soon as well.

The Mayan's history reflects the ups and downs of its neighborhood. It went from stage shows to movies, eventually programming X-rated movies before being revived as a nightclub in 1990. Joher said that with the neighborhood's revitalization and the ready audience for touring artists, "I doubt we'll be moving ... to professional wrestling and burlesque," both of which have taken the stage at the Mayan over the years.

For the record

Representing the landlord in this transaction were John Anthony, SIOR, Christopher Steck, CCIM, and Heather Isenberg of Kidder Mathews.