

SILVER SCREEN HAS SILVER LINING



STANDARD-TIMES PHOTO BY CYNTHIA ESPARZA

Modernization of the Texas Theatre will consist of new seating and brighter colors. This week, workers are taking out chairs and wall material, and working on electrical wiring.

Theater overhaul ongoing

The Texas Theatre's big auditorium looks different in the daylight. Sunlight accents the 77-year-old movie palace's age — and her beauty.

Before last week, I had only seen the downtown building's interior in dim, shadowy movie theater lighting. Visiting the Texas always felt a bit like stepping into a dark, mysterious cavern.

Last week, workers propped open the building's big rear doors. Summer breezes and late-afternoon sunshine poured across the open stage, filling the building with fresh air and light all the way to the balcony.

The bright light emphasized

the old building's age-related wrinkles: the rain-damaged plaster ceiling; the ripped seat upholstery; the peeling, faded paint.

The light also highlighted her beauty, from the bright red brick-work backstage to the exotic statues and fancy details along the

auditorium's soaring walls.

Then, too, light revealed her solid bones. Beneath the chipped plaster and flaking paint, she's one hard lady — all concrete, brick and steel.

Work crews are giving the Twohig Avenue theater a major makeover. She's getting a face lift, some reconstructive surgery and a lot of tender, loving care.

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If all goes as planned, she'll come out of retirement when the work's done in about two years and play yet another role in the city's history.

A month ago, Cal Collins, a San Antonio theater producer and car salesman, bought the building from San Angeloans Kenneth Gunter and Lee Pfluger.

Cal announced plans to renovate the theater and use it for live theatrical and musical productions, as well as for movies and other events.

He's off to a fast start.

Since Cal took over the Texas,

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crews have stripped decades of obsolete equipment from the interior, including the theater's old stage curtains and its ancient movie screen.

Workers also rewired or replaced the building's interior lights, removed partitions from the big basement and performed dozens of other jobs.

From the basement to the balcony, the stripped-down, swept-out building looks clean and lean.

Last week when I visited, workers were debating how to remove 50-year-old, minivan-size air-conditioning equipment from the basement.

Other workers shoveled demolition debris from a restroom just off the lobby.

Glen Carr, the theater's longtime caretaker and curator, helps oversee the restoration.

"I just hope the good Lord lets me live long enough to see it finished," Glen told me, smiling.

While he said he's thrilled with the project, parts have been painful.

"When they tore the screen down the other day, it just about killed me," he said, his voice cracking. "I'm sentimental, and it had been a part of this building for so long."

But, he added, "If it's for the betterment of the building, I'm for it. Cal has a reasonable plan, and he's taking it one step at a time."

Except for brief interludes, the Texas has remained dark, empty and mostly forgotten for decades.

Now the old beauty's once again full of life and light.

She's not back in the spotlight yet — not by a long shot. But the stage is set.