

Moment shops a 'shiny beacon'

Yuri Lee and **Angie Chua** called it "a dream come true" when they moved their DIY businesses into brand new storefronts on San Pedro Square two and a half years ago.

Their prime brick-and-mortar location, called Moment, was created when the San Jose Downtown Association converted parking spaces at the city-owned Market-San Pedro garage into four micro shops. Originally conceived to enliven the moribund garage-side of San Pedro Street and provide entrepreneurs with retail space where they could test their products on a rotating basis, Moment has delivered on its goals.

Lee's Fractal Flora and Chua's Bobo Design Studio were two of the four original stores when Moment opened in May 2018.

"Creative entrepreneurs often start their journey the same way," Chua said. "They use their skills to make something, someone admires the work and encourages them to sell it, they do, and the next thing they know, 'I guess I have a business!' Turning that hobby into a career was much more appealing than working a grueling nine-to-five."

Chua described the process from home-based business to storefront for San Jose's maker community.

"We realize that this creative outlet — which keeps us sane — may actually be a viable living, so we dedicate ourselves to it full time," she explained. "We're up at 5 a.m. driving to a farmers' market and signing up for craft fairs and shows. We're loading in, selling for eight hours, loading out and driving home just to get up and do it all over again."

"Brick-and-mortar is the aspiration for all makers. Instead of driving a truck, I have my own space. For me, Moment was that shiny beacon and my opportunity to test the waters. Signing a lease, being a part of the community — that was my dream come true."

Chua and Lee both left lucrative technology jobs behind to pursue their passions.

"I was plugged into tech, but something was missing," Lee said. "We found solace in nature. We also found ourselves plant shopping and that gave us joy."

That led Lee to Fractal Flora, which fulfilled personal and professional goals to reconnect people with nature by bringing nature into their personal spaces. She sells and curates collectible plants that inspire her customers to add to their collection.

One of her customers is Chua, who attested: "As I learned more about caring for plants, I gravitated away from Home Depot to the plants Yuri offers. I enjoyed buying unique plants that no one else had."

Their transition away from tech jobs into "plant parenthood" is one of several things they have in common.

Both preferred working with their hands rather than working with spreadsheets. Both created artisan products — Chua created "wanderlust"-themed apparel and hand-crafted bags intended for people to "unplug and reconnect with themselves," and Lee made customized terrariums that allowed people to "escape to places in their fondest dreams."

Both took the risk to pursue self-made careers, seeking a more grounded and less financial definition of success. Both became a part of SJMADE, at first not knowing the other. After SJDA contracted with SJMADE to manage tenant recruitment for Moment, Lee and Chua jumped at the chance to be part of the inaugural group of micro-retailers.

And both did well enough to move their businesses into larger locations



Angie Chua inside her new Bobo Design Studio.

in the greater downtown area — much to the delight of the organizations behind the Moment concept — SJDA, City of San Jose, SJMADE and the Knight Foundation.

"Our plan was to activate both sides of San Pedro Street while giving entrepreneurs a chance to get started downtown," said **Scott Knies**, SJDA executive director. "It's wonderful to see that happening."

Unable to find a workable space in the city's core, Fractal Flora celebrated the grand opening of its new location at 1461 Park Ave. in the Rose Garden on Oct. 31. Bobo Design Studio currently has a studio space in Japantown that Chua shares with two other artisan businesses in San Jose (Le Petit Elefant, and The Little Red House) and hopes to open it up for workshops and private shopping once it's safer with Covid.

They are thankful for the Moment opportunity because they learned so much in the short time they were running their businesses in San Pedro Square.

"The small business owner is CEO, CFO, operations, ordering, creating," Lee said. "Hiring employees is the biggest learning experience. Having people and all the responsibilities — delegating, teaching others to have passion, managing hours, aligning and inspiring them to be interested and keep them engaged."

Employees also added to the financial burden, as did Moment's required operating hours.

"And to be open 60 hours a week," Lee said. "We're makers still developing — you need creative time."

Chua added: "Moment was a very aggressive boot camp on how to open a brick-and-mortar store. Buying fixtures, stocking the store, developing merchandising skills, navigating things like rental insurance for three months when most require a year-long contract. There are lots of little things to consider when you start a brick-and-mortar that are not designed for short-term leases."

Chua found that her apparel and handcrafted bag business was not scalable.

"I would be thrilled to sell one of my handcrafted bags, only to then realize that as soon as my day was done at the shop, I'd have to rush home and stay up to make another bag to replace it. It's a good problem to have," she said. She eventually shifted her skill set and developed stationery. "Now, I design and make things once and reproduce it."

Both of them appreciated every moment.

"Each day is so rewarding," Chua said. "I'm so grateful for the experience and fortunate that I get to run this business."

The entrepreneurs also grew a friendship at Moment.

"After Angie left, I carried her products in my store," Lee said. "People were missing them."

"I became so close with the SJMADE community," Lee added. "It transformed what I think about San Jose. It's the last haven for artists and makers in the Bay Area. And Moment is every makers' dream — at least for a little bit."

Both still work closely with **Kevin Biggers**, SJMADE's chief strategist, and **Marie Millares**, an SJMADE founder now Street Life Manager for SJDA.

"They cared so much for makers," Chua said.

Biggers said it was no surprise Chua and Lee were in Moment's first graduating class.

"We had a strong sense of their imminent success," Biggers said. "These are two small businesses where you just know — after spending even a little time getting to know them — they're going to do something special."

During Covid, Lee's business was closed for three months and she spent time improving and streamlining the e-commerce side of her business. When she reopened in her two Moment storefronts, she tried the window-shopping concept, with customers looking in from the outside and pointing to the plants they wanted to purchase. Business dropped 80 percent, forcing her to let her employees go.

Chua braced for the worst, but was surprised that her travel-centric stationery and products have sold "exceptionally well" during the pandemic.

"People vote with their dollars," she said. "I worked hard to continue to create value in my products during a time when people were being more selective where they spent their money during this difficult time."

In recent months, Lee relied on the service side of her business — providing plants and flowers for weddings, office installations and plant maintenance — to make ends meet. Chua, a hand-lettering artist and illustrator, has helped other downtown businesses by doing pro-bono window writing and art during the early months of Covid. She is continuing to spread good cheer in San Pedro Square by working with SJDA and painting murals and messages on the street's AI Fresco program barriers.

Both now know first-hand: "Having community behind you is so important," Chua said.

Moment tenants since opening

Bobo Design Studio

May 2018-January 2019

Sea Seniorita Studios

May 2018-mid-August 2018

Fractal Flora

May 2018-August 2020

Blooms Privé

May 2018-July 2018

Empire in the Air

September 2018-January 2019

Hapertas & Co

September 2018-January 2019

Le Petit Elefant

October 2018

PMBQ Studios

February 2019-March 2019

Traveling Calligrapher

May 2019-February 2020

The Source Zero

Mid-February 2019-present

Aulala Design

July 2020-present

Empire in the Air

September 2020

SJMADE Animal Crossing

Two weeks, September-October 2020

BlackSheepMade

October 2020-present

SJMADE Store

November 2020-present



Yuri Lee at the original Fractal Flora.

Light the Holiday Nights Downtown San Jose
Nov. 26-Jan. 3: Despite the main traditions and attractions of Downtown for the Holidays derailed by Covid-19, the festive lights of the season will shine bright in the city center.



“Just like **Dr. Seuss’** Whos of Whoville, no Grinch or pandemic can take away our holiday cheer,” said

Autumn Young, director of special projects for San Jose Downtown Association.

With Downtown Ice, Christmas in the Park and Winter Wonderland shutdown or moved by the Covid pandemic, the heart of the city faced not being wrapped in its usual holiday best.

“No way were we going to leave the center of the city dark this season when we need to be uplifted more than ever,” said **Scott Knies**, SJDA Executive Director.

The main feature to Downtown Lights will be the Light the Holiday Nights installation at Plaza de Cesar Chavez. From dusk to dawn Thanksgiving through Jan. 3, Light the Holiday Nights will light the stage and the trees ringing Plaza de Cesar Chavez.

“We had to brighten up the center of the city,” Knies said.

Multiple sponsors agree. Light the Holiday Nights will be produced by SJDA in coordination with the City of San Jose and Downtown Property-Based Improvement District, and supported by presenting sponsor First Tech Federal Credit Union and downtown property owners Jay Paul Company, Google, Sobrato, Swenson and Urban Catalyst. Together, the partners have created an illuminated wonderland, with lights in the park’s existing trees, more lighted trees brought in for the occasion and sparkling arches, ideal for a drive-around or a stroll through. A 26-foot-tall stylized holiday tree perched atop the stage on the north end of the park will be a primary feature.

“This is an interim installation to get us through this

unusual holiday season and keep the spirits up until Christmas in the Park can return next year,” Young said.

The project is designed as a “passive and festive” strolling experience. Visitors can be part of the excitement by adding lights to their person, pets and kids, but they also must wear their masks and make sure they are properly socially distanced of six feet or more from other parties. Large families should break up into smaller groups to avoid blocking pathways and to keep the experience safe for everyone.

“Light the Downtown Nights will bring much-needed cheer to our downtown essential workers, residents and visitors,” said **Doug Bartl**, president of the PBID Board of Directors.

The Plaza Park installation is part of a larger Downtown Lights experience planned for the holidays, which includes these highlights:

- ◆ Lighting of trees and buildings at 50 West San Fernando, Miro and City Hall
- ◆ Activated window at The Tech Interactive
- ◆ “Video mapping” lighted projections on the former Camera 12 building on Paseo de San Antonio and Second Street, and the Cathedral Basilica of St. Joseph at San Fernando and Market streets.
- ◆ “The Story of Holiday Arts” featuring costumes from San Jose productions of The Nutcracker, A Christmas Carol and Hansel and Gretel plus chairs and stands to represent the missing musicians and audiences for the symphony and holiday musicals in the windows at 125 S. Market St.

Holiday Market on Dec. 4, 11 and 18: The first three Fridays in December will feature a combination of Farmers Market and artist vendors creating a Holiday Market in San Pedro Square on Dec. 4, 11 and 18 from 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Find artisans selling jewelry, candles, lotions, gift baskets, holiday cards, plants and other gifts for the holidays.

Also, the Moment shops lining San Pedro Street – Aulala

Design, BlackSheepMade, The SJMADE Shop and The Source Zero — will feature an array of the best gifts available from SJMADE artists/entrepreneurs.

“Everyone who attends will have room to move through the market safely,” said **Donna Butcher**, SJDA event coordinator. “It will be a new and fun twist for Downtown San Jose for the holidays.”

Follow the Holiday Market at sjdowntown.com.

Another 10 Downtown Doors: Ten more Downtown Doors were added to the downtown public art landscape in November. The additional 10 from the February-March 2020 submissions brings the total for the year to 20, which is normal for the program.

Downtown Doors is the San Jose Downtown Foundation’s popular program where student artists from area high schools submit their best work, which is judged, transferred to large vinyl posters, and attached to downtown’s service doors and utility boxes. This year’s 20 winners came from a limited group of schools because of coronavirus, but the quality of the work remained as high as ever.

Selections include: Timeless by **Selena Huang**, Evergreen Valley H.S.; Unnamed by **Lillian Tran**, Andrew Hill HS; Tea and Cookies by **Sonia Portillo**, Del Mar HS; Ananda by **Alex Hayner**, Gunderson HS; Solace by **Heidi Shin**, Silver Creek HS; Unnamed by **Madison Sciba**, Silver Creek HS; The Boy in Red by **Dinhe Calamateos-Abarca**, Leigh HS; Girl in Daisy by **Michaela Sampas**, Leigh HS; The Noodle Revolution



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by **Allison Young**, Santa Teresa HS; and Expand Your Horizons by **Cindy Ly**, Willow Glen HS.

“I am very excited to be a part of Downtown Doors and hope others will resonate with the message I am trying to convey,” said Ly, now in her first year at UCLA. Her message: “Remember that change is not always bad. Experiencing new things and exploring new interests is a part of life and will shape you into the person you are.”

The artists will be feted during the 2021 spring reception. Each selected student-artist receives a \$300 honorarium and access to Adobe’s Creative Cloud and their schools receive a \$650 cash award which is often used to purchase supplies for art classes.



Virtual Santa Run is on: The Santa Run will happen this year, just not in the organized run of the past. Participants will still dress up, and take a 5-kilometer run by themselves.

Everyone who signs up will receive a festive race shirt, medal and holiday neckerchief, headband, balaclava or shirt. The Santa Run benefits SJDA’s Light the Holiday Nights, Christmas in the Park, which has moved for this season into a drive-through experience in History Park, and Reading Partners children’s literacy project. Go to santarunsv.com for information and to register.

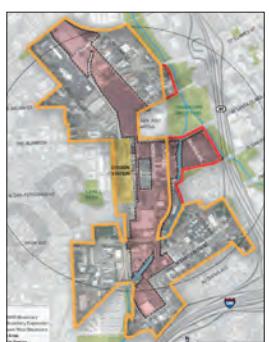
Downtown News

Public input welcomed for revised Diridon Plan:

So much has changed in the six years since the city approved its development plan for the 250-acre area around Diridon Station, planning staff has amended the plan and now seek input from the community by Jan. 8. There are several major changes — such as a Major League Baseball stadium south of the train station is no longer in the plan. The amended Diridon Specific Area Plan (DSAP) is now 262 acres inclusive of the 80 acres Google owns with its own separate Downtown West plan. The DSAP building heights are now about double that of the 2014 version thanks to new city policies balancing airport and downtown development needs that SJDA helped advance.

The far-reaching DSAP amendment also contemplates 25 percent affordable housing in the area, climate-smart environmental changes, 19 acres of open space and parks, and an integrated transportation network for trains, light rail, BART, buses, taxis, vehicle parking and bicycles.

By expanding the Diridon plan area to include portions of



Delmas and Autumn streets, the city is conducting zoning and environmental review so that:

- ◆ Residential units can approach 13,519, including Google’s suggested 5,900 units. Of these, 25 percent would be affordable units, or up to 3,380 units;

◆ Office can max out to 14.4 million square feet, including Google’s proposed 7.3 million square feet;

◆ Active use and retail can add up to 1 million square feet, inclusive of Google’s 500,000 square feet;

◆ And 300 hotel rooms, all on Google’s property.

Building height limits would range from 180-295 feet and “step-down” to 90 feet on the eastern and southern borders of the development area, where buildings would be adjacent to existing housing.

Following Google’s plans, the city intends to update sections on land use and urban design, expand parks, plazas and trails and create a more pedestrian and bicycle-friendly area.

Staff will include public comment in its proposal to the Planning Commission and the City Council. Public comment can be made at diridonsj.org/fall2020-dsap.

City Council improves Al Fresco dining: The city continues to modify its Al Fresco program in the best interest of downtown restaurants in hopes they can survive the pandemic.

On Nov. 3, the City Council extended Al Fresco hours from 10 p.m. to midnight in the downtown at the request of SJDA and members. The Council also extended Al Fresco activities to June 30, 2021, allowing businesses to plan ahead in the pandemic uncertainty.

“The extensions allow the hospitality businesses some certainty in a time of ever-changing regulations so that they can make decisions and investments to help them survive this extremely difficult phase,” said **Nate LeBlanc**, business development manager.

For example, restaurants can plan better for how much to invest to make customers comfortable during cold winter months. Newly passed winterization regulations allow heaters to be placed on sidewalks for outdoor retail. Heaters were already allowed on private property, street areas and parklets.

Also to keep businesses prospering during chilly conditions:

- ◆ Tents over 400 square feet and canopies over 700 square feet will be allowed on private property and public sidewalks with a separate permit from the City of San Jose;
- ◆ Tents over 400 square feet and canopies over 700 square feet will be allowed on parklets and street business areas with a separate permit from the Fire Department. For structures, these businesses must obtain a permit from The Public Works Department.

Part of the winterization plan for restaurants is to remind customers that in colder weather cities and Europe, they have dined outdoors year-round.

Restaurants are working with the city and SJDA to add more parklets downtown for Al Fresco dining on several other streets. To keep up with Al Fresco dining opportunities, visit sanjoseca.gov/sjalfresco.

Business News

Trading places: The Trade Desk digital advertising company will move its San Jose office out of Jay Paul Co.-owned CityView Plaza into Jay Paul Co.-owned 50 West at

San Fernando and South First streets.

The fast-growing company will occupy the top floor above the Capital Club — a 13,950-square-foot space that only in the last few years has added windows so that it can host an office use. The Trade Desk’s growth is attributable to the quickly advancing Connected TV industry, which allows any TV to connect to the internet.

Headquartered in Ventura, The Trade Desk has 11 U.S. offices and 12 worldwide offices.

Ole el cafecito: With San Jose Museum of Art reopening in October, **Adolfo Gomez’s** el cafecito has also officially opened, replacing Café Too! Cafecito translates to coffee, and the menu includes a full page of coffee choices. The meal side of the menu includes sandwiches, paninis, prawn and chicken avocado Caesar salad, vegetarian wrap and tortilla soup. Like the museum, the café is open Friday-Sunday for food service outdoors and takeout.

From the Archives

15 years ago – December 2005 — The city formed a Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) of 35 hotels to market the city, its hotels and its convention facilities managed by Team San Jose.

20 years ago – December 2000 — After a decade in storage, the controversial bronze statue of Thomas Fallon was installed on the Pellier Park median of St. James Street.

25 years ago – December 1995 — Seven downtown businesses hired compassionate clown **Mr. Twister** to put coins in expired meters of “forgetful customers.”

Mr. Twister had made national headlines two months earlier for receiving a \$13 ticket in Santa Cruz for feeding meters. The merchants wanted to point out that as they rebuilt downtown’s economy, they wanted the area to be user-friendly and not frighten customers away.

30 years ago – December 1990 — In the aftermath of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, the city passed a law requiring 106 unreinforced masonry buildings downtown — many of them of historic significance — to be strengthened within four years. The city also provided incentives such as exemptions from building permit and planning department fees, design grants and rent stabilization and relocation assistance grants.

SJDA Year-in-Review Meeting Dec. 11

SJDA’s annual Year-in-Review presentation will be presented virtually this year on Dec. 11, starting at 8:15 a.m. Beside a recap of 2020, the December public meeting will also include the Golden Nail presentation and a farewell to SJDA and PBID Board of Directors members reaching the end of their terms. RSVP at sjdarsvp@sjdowntown.com and you will receive a Zoom link and pass code.

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