

Cookie cutters are for cookies

Shopping centers, which are lavished with millions in planning, construction, and promotional development, often seem to choose the name as an afterthought. For example, if that monumental failure in shopping centers formerly known as Fashion Island had spent a little more effort getting a good name, and demonstrating to potential customers how to find the place, it might have been a success.

It was recently sold. The new owner allotted the magnificent sum of \$500 to reward the person who thought up a new name. The name chosen, San Mateo Bridgepointe, is pretty pointless. It gets the name "San Mateo" in there, and hints it's near the San Mateo Bridge.

Not that it's any more banal than many centers. Several shopping centers along Skyline Boulevard; Skyline Plaza, Fairmont Shopping Center, Pacific Heights Shopping Center and Portola Highlands Shopping Center took their names from subdivisions or the highway. Two are gone, victims of fog and bad planning. The other two would probably not have been built if they knew then what they know now.

Pacific Manor Village, Linda Mar Shopping Center, Serramonte Center in each case is named after a subdivision. Tanforan took its name and theme from the former race track. Hillsdale,

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in my opinion, is a dumb name, meaningless and trite. It could be used almost anywhere outside of Florida and Mississippi and seem as appropriate.

All over the country, however, developers seem to have a poverty of imagination. About two dozen words, put into a bag, shaken up and drawn at random, would have served as well as the actual results in most cases. North, East, South and West, Mont, Hill, Ridge, Gate, Plaza, Mall, Village, Fair, Stone, Valley, Dale, Sun, Rise, Shore, Broadway, Port, Wood, Lake, Way, Square. One or more of these 24 words are included in the names of well over half the shopping centers in this country. Fairmont Shopping Center started out as Westmont. Eastmont Mall is in Oakland. Somewhere there is certainly a Northmont and a Southmont. There's a North Gate Mall in San Rafael, a North Gate Plaza in San Diego, a West Gate Mall in San Jose, and a South Gate Center in Sacramento. Where is

East Gate? There is already an Eastridge and an Oakridge in San Jose, and a Fruitridge in Sacramento. North Bay Centre is in Rohnert Park, South Bay Center in Redondo Beach, Bay Fair in San Leandro, Valley Fair in San Jose.

Locally I wish they would rename the banal Park Mall Shopping Center "Andy's Center" after Andy Oddstad. Eureka Square was named after Eureka Savings and Loan. This gave it a mining theme, inappropriate to Pacifica but better than Fashion Island or Hillsdale. I would change Linda Mar Shopping Center to Pruristac Center, after the Ohlone Village that used to be here. Unmelodious, but authentic. It would also give them a sales theme. Shopping centers, like cities, need to be originals. Let's have a little more imagination. Shopping centers need original names, and distinctive businesses. Save cookie cutters for chocolate chips.