

Crystal clear

That's developer Sandy Shapery's vision for his work — and his life

By Sarah Pattee
Tribune Staff Writer

IT WON'T BE the biggest or the tallest. But Sandy Shapery's planned downtown skyscraper will be, well, the most perfect, he says.

That's because his office-hotel complex was designed with nature in mind, according to the flamboyant, 43-year-old developer.

"We've tried to take a lesson from nature by creating in harmony with the universe," he said.

His skyscraper was designed using crystalline shapes, specifically, triangles like the Egyptian pyramids. The ancient Egyptians believed that triangles spark powerful theta waves in people's brains. Shapery, too, believes in the power of crystals.

He believes his hexagonal-shaped project — hexagons are made by joining six triangles — will be more energy-efficient and spark greater creativity in its occupants than traditional box-shaped buildings.

Models of the futuristic complex



Sandy Shapery

make it look like a space-age honeycomb, with eight green-glassed towers poking into the downtown sky. The hotel-office complex is planned for the northern side of Broadway between State and Columbia streets.

Nothing nearby even remotely looks like Shapery's project.

Of course, he doesn't immediately spring crystals on what he calls the "conservative, button-down types" he's hoping to lure into his building. First he throws financial figures at them. Then he mentions crystals.

"At first people look a little surprised ... but anybody who can appreciate excellence is impressed," Shapery said.

Shapery's own theta waves run in overdrive. During a recent interview he juggled questions in the middle of a dozen phone calls from investors and a flurry of documents being shoved under his nose.

He quickly kissed his son, 7-month-old Sage. The infant had stopped by with his mother, Anne Hyatt Shapery, who was switching the Rolls car keys for the Ferrari keys. Meanwhile, a secretary was hovering nervously, worried that 12 minutes wasn't enough time for Shapery to catch a plane to Hawaii.

Ignoring her, he eagerly displayed another project, a remodeling of his La Jolla Cove Plaza shopping center. In between, he freely rattled off tidbits about his turgid life, including careers that bounced from auto mechanic to lawyer to developer; his castle, his lawsuit against megawatt lawyer Melvin Belli while he was a summer-intern law student in Belli's office and his stint before the U.S. Supreme Court only two years out of law school.

Then there are the numbers he throws out — his IQ of 156, his alge-



bra test results from sixth grade (he still has the papers to prove it), his four homes, six cars and millions of dollars he has accumulated.

He credits his parents with helping him gather his wealth, which he puts at somewhere between \$15 million and \$50 million, not because they gave it to him but because they didn't. As a teen-ager his parents made him work for the hip clothing and greasy kid stuff his peers sported. Mom and Dad didn't think "nice Jewish boys" should be dressing like toughs.

"So I started hustling for jobs. I was very money-oriented at a very early age," he said.

At 15, he was buying and selling car parts. It was the beginning of a

long career of wheeling and dealing to buying for less and selling for much more. He calls it "creative financing."

In 1978 he bought the La Jolla shopping center for \$1.1 million. He sold it two years later for \$2.8 million, cash. He then bought it back two years later, in 1982, for \$3.5 million and says it's now worth \$5 million.

Shapery did the same thing with the 10,000-square-foot home known as the Del Mar Castle. He bought the Spanish-style residence on a whim in 1978 for \$575,000. After spending nearly that much in repair bills as well as entertaining constant visits from "relatives I never knew I had," Shapery said, he decided to sell for \$2 million.

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*Shapery

It wasn't that easy. Not many people wanted a home so big, he says, it took half an hour to walk from the bedroom to the kitchen.

"If you had a party with less than 300 people in the living room, it looked like no one was there," Shapery said.

Instead, he leased the castle and that started more trouble. First J. David Dominelli tried to buy it, and ended up walking away from \$85,000 in non-refundable deposits when his financial empire collapsed.

Then came the Del Mar sex scandal. A tantric Yoga group booked the castle for an encounter session for couples, who were promised a "cosmic orgasm." All it took was for a local disc jockey to refer to the sessions as "sex orgies" and Del Mar went berserk. The City Council called an emergency session. Shapery canceled the event after he got dozens of angry phone calls. He laughs about it now.

He then slashed the price to \$1.5 million and sold the castle in 1984 to Tony Robbins, best known for walking through fire as part of his human potential-building business.

Shapery now lives in a modest La Jolla bungalow, one of his four homes. He's planning to exchange

that for an oceanfront home in La Jolla as soon as he can.

The developer calls his free-wheeling style "lateral thinking," a phrase lifted from the latest business jargon.

"I take different areas that appear to be unconnected and I find connections," he said.

Take Japanese yen and crystals, for example. His downtown skyscraper includes the 497-room Emerald Hotel, owned by a subsidiary of the huge Japanese conglomerate Tokyu Corp.

"Emerald ... green glass ... crystals," Shapery said slowly, savoring the words. "It seems like almost a mystical connection, almost like it was fate."

The Japanese got involved after Shapery stayed in Emerald's first U.S. hotel in Anaheim. So impressed with the staff, he wrote Emerald's president, Yoshiyu Tanaka, in Hawaii. He also enclosed a rendering of his downtown building project.

Tanaka was intrigued. So was Emerald's parent company, Tokyu Corp., which offered a joint venture partnership and an initial investment of \$100 million. That happened only after a six-man team from Japan spent two weeks investigating Shapery's background as well as San

Diego's economy and tourist industry, right down to the annual rainfall.

Shapery knows the crystals have little to do with the deal, but he is tickled about his partners. And he's punchy about his new crystal building, with such features as vents that let fresh air into the offices and the water-cooled system that drastically reduces the need for air conditioning. He says studies show the resulting negatively ionized air is better for humans and can cut down on absenteeism (as opposed to positively ionized air recirculated through air conditioning).

He's also tickled that he beat out the Koll Corp., which he says tried to horn in on his downtown lot and his partnership with Tokyu.

"It was a David and Goliath kind of thing," he said, explaining how he was able to talk the city into giving him exclusive rights to the property.

The company is now building its \$200 million mixed-use Koll Center across the street from Shapery on Broadway.

The David and Goliath story would work for Shapery's experience as a summer law clerk for lawyer Belli. (He financed his University of San Diego law studies by restoring and selling wrecked Corvettes.) After

writing an article for USD's "Law Review" on prisoners' rights for Belli, Shapery learned Belli had demanded full credit.

The law student responded by serving papers — while Belli was giving a televised press conference on another case in San Diego. A law dean tried to get Shapery kicked out of school but couldn't. Instead, Shapery was dismissed from the Law Review board.

He shrugs now at the injustice.

"It's just a constant matter of educating people. Those people just needed to learn," he said.

He has learned things, too, he says. Especially since meeting Anne, Sage's mother, a year ago. She took his name although they're not married. (Shapery also has a 14-year-old son, Steve, from his first marriage.)

"Anne has taught me about feelings, which is more important than anything else I have learned," he said.

And that brings him back to crystals and the idea of positive thinking.

"I try to act positively in the universe so positive things happen to me," he said.