The 1990s

THE NEW AGE OF COMIC-CON

Comic-Con moved into the brand-new San Diego Convention Center in 1991, beginning a three-decade period of growth in its new home. Everything old—including nostalgia—seemed new again.
This was Comic-Con’s last year at CPAC, with a new home at the just-built San Diego Convention Center on the horizon. To make room for a growing convention, a food services and lounge area was set up on the plaza area outside the CPAC buildings. The blood drive expanded to two days (Thursday and Friday), with the BloodMobile parked outside the center’s lobby on First Avenue. A welcoming night party was held at the Kingston Hotel (now the Bristol), saluting the 50th anniversary of Will Eisner’s The Spirit. The after-banquet party featuring Seduction of the Innocent was prematurely shortened because of noise complaints from the hotel. In programming, fans got to hear all about a new TV show, The Simpsons, created by long-time Comic-Con attendee and exhibitor Matt Groening.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: One last look at the Comic-Con Exhibit Hall at CPAC.

BOTTOM LEFT: George Pérez’s Souvenir Book contribution salutes the 50th anniversary of Captain America.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Stan Lee seems shocked at the appearance of Spider-Man. Spider-Man is always at Comic-Con.

THIS PAGE, TOP: Bill Morrison’s amazing Souvenir Book cover evokes the “big letter” greetings from postcards of yore, this time filled with a plethora of comics and animation characters.

BOTTOM RIGHT: The official Comic-Con T-shirt featured Captain America’s 50th anniversary with art by Kevin Maguire and Terry Austin.

BELOW: Hopey by Jaime Hernández.

NOTABLE GUESTS

PETER DAVID
Comic book, fiction writer, Incredible Hulk, Supergirl
Star Trek novels

CARL MACEK
Screenwriter, producer, Robotech

GRANT MORRISON
Comic book writer, Doom Patrol, Arkham Asylum

JOHN ROMITA JR.
Comic book artist, Amazing Spider-Man, X-Men

MARK SCHULTZ
Comic book writer-artist, Xenozoic Tales

VAN WILLIAMS
Actor, The Green Hornet TV series
In February 1991 the Con committee experimented with putting on a smaller winter comics and SF convention, Con/Fusion, with special guests artist Steve Rude (Wolverine) and SF author Tim Powers. That turned out to be the last Comic-Con event held at CPAC. The big news was Comic-Con’s move to the San Diego Convention Center, using Halls A and B and some programming space upstairs. The July 4 weekend made the move even more special: An Independence Day party was held on the back patio, with a great view of local fireworks. Fans also got to see an advance screening of Dave Stevens’ The Rocketeer movie, a performance of the play American Splendor (based on Harvey Pekar’s comic and starring The Simpsons’ Dan Castellaneta as Pekar), and the first Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards presentation under the auspices of Comic-Con, with Jackie Estrada as the awards administrator, a role she continues in to this day. And Martin Jaquish took over as the Masquerade Coordinator, starting a continuing run in that position for 28 years.
This was the year that standing in line hit full force. Both Image and Valiant had burst onto the scene, and fans waited patiently for hours to get autographs from Jim Lee, Todd McFarlane, Rob Liefeld et al. Fantagraphics threw a party for the 10th anniversary of the Hernandez Brothers’ Love and Rockets. Dark Horse published its first issue of San Diego Comic-Con Comics, which would be published annually through 1995. A highlight for many was the 75th birthday party for Jack Kirby, with a rousing speech by Frank Miller. Banners graced Harbor Drive for the first time, and everyone in San Diego saw Comic-Con bus ads. The Comics Art Conference debuted and presented an academic look at the medium; it’s still going strong today at both Comic-Con and WonderCon, and has programs every day of each convention. Phil Foglio began his long run as MC of the Masquerade, which was held at Symphony Hall.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT: Jack Kirby’s next-to-last appearance at Comic-Con was marked by the happy occasion of his 75th birthday and tons of special tributes to The King in the Souvenir Book.

TOP RIGHT: Dark Horse Comics and Comic-Con teamed up for this first of four issues of San Diego Comic-Con Comics, given free to attendees. The second issue in 1993 showcased the first appearance of Mike Mignola’s Hellboy.

MIDDLE: Kirby tributes by (left to right) Bill Stout, John Buscema, and Will Eisner.

BOTTOM: William Shatner and director Francis Ford Coppola made Comic-Con appearances.

THIS PAGE, TOP: Ken Steacy’s cover featured a kid and his dogs, both in capes, and the magic of make-believe combined with the fun of comics.

BOTTOM: Lobo was big in 1992, and he proved it with this official Comic-Con T-shirt!
Comic-Con expanded its Exhibit Hall to fill out the entire ground floor of the San Diego Convention Center (Halls A through C), instituting an autograph signing area and plenty of room for portfolio reviews. DC wowed everyone with its megaboos dubbed “Wayne’s World” after DC’s director of sales Bob Wayne. Independent publishing was the new thing, with creator Dave Sim (Cerebus) on hand, along with Scott McCloud (Zot!), Larry Marder (Tales of the Beanworld), and Jeff Smith (Bone). The Eisner Awards were held on Thursday evening, drawing a large crowd that saw Frank Miller and Neil Gaiman garner the lion’s share of the plaques. The Will Eisner Spirit of Comics Retailer Award was added at the urging of Eisner himself, saluting the best comic shops in the world and their connection between creators, publishers and readers. The first year’s recipients were Moondog’s in Chicago, IL, The Beguiling in Toronto, Canada, and Comic Relief in Berkeley, CA.
Comic-Con celebrated its 25th event and exhibitors took a cue from DC and set up much more elaborate booths. The Tekno Comix booth featured a rising fist gripping the company’s logo and guest appearances by Mickey Spillane, Leonard Nimoy, and Majel Barrett Roddenberry. Valiant had a two-story booth. Jim Shooter’s new company, Defiant, had a medieval tower, while Full Moon had a jungle-style movie set. At the other end of the spectrum, the first Small Press Area was created in the Exhibit Hall for publishers with small press runs and a limited number of titles. There were special screenings of Natural Born Killers and The Mask, and on Saturday a gala Monte Carlo night was held under the sails on the top level of the San Diego Convention Center. Manga superstar Rumiko Takahashi (Urusei Yatsura) made a rare U.S. convention appearance, and a “new” artist named Alex Ross took home multiple Eisner Awards for his art on Marvel.

Comic-Con marked the 25th Comic-Con. These banners lined Harbor Drive and other areas of San Diego, like Seaport Village, for many years during Comic-Con.

You knew Comic-Con was coming when you started to see these ads on San Diego buses. Jean-Claude van Damme came to Comic-Con to talk about Timecop, the Dark Horse Comics movie production. Sergio Aragonés and Groo’s doggo, Rufferto, also celebrated the Con’s 25th anniversary.

The DC Comics booth changed the way big publishers presented themselves at Comic-Con. Leonard Nimoy at Comic-Con for Tekno Comics. Manga legend Rumiko Takahashi.

**THIS PAGE TOP:** The Simpsons graced the Souvenir Book cover with a giant Comic-Con cake. Art by Bill Morrison, Steve Vance, and Matt Groening.

**THIS PAGE BOTTOM:** The official T-shirt promoted DC Comic’s summer miniseries, Zero Hour.
The name of the event was officially changed to Comic-Con International: San Diego, and the new “eye” logo, designed by Richard Bruning and Josh Beatman, was introduced (much to the Toucan’s dismay). The Eisner Awards ceremony was moved to Friday night—where it’s remained ever since—and combined with the Inkpots, so the banquet was no more. Neil Gaiman was the keynote speaker at the newly combined ceremony. The Independent Publishers Pavilion, instituted on the Exhibit Hall floor in 1994, featured such self-publishers as Jeff Smith, Terry Moore, Batton Lash, Paul Pope, Linda Medley, Charles Vess, Don Simpson, Marc Hempel, and Mark Wheatley. Frank Frazetta made a surprise appearance as a guest of Glen Danzig’s new Verotik line. Magic: The Gathering was big among gamers, and Lloyd Kaufman brought lots of Troma films.

**THIS PAGE TOP:**
The Toucan went gently off into retirement with the premier of the new Comic-Con International logo, but . . .

**BOTTOM:** He did make a cameos appearance on the official T-shirt, featuring Death and Sandman with art by Chris Bachalo.

Neil Gaiman and Jeff Smith were Eisner Award winners.
For the second time, Comic-Con fell on the Fourth of July weekend. This time it was because of the Republican National Convention, held later that summer in San Diego. Themes included a salute to 1986 (the publication year of Watchmen, Dark Knight, and Maus), the 30th anniversaries of Star Trek and the Silver Surfer, and Saturday morning cartoons. By this point there were seven main programming rooms on the Mezzanine and Upper Level, plus three rooms devoted to workshops and seminars. Programming highlights included a special tribute to Superman co-creator Jerry Siegel (who had recently died), “Meet the Batwomen” with actresses Yvonne Craig (Batgirl) and Julie Newmar (Catwoman), and a panel on “Social Change in Comics” with Ed Brubaker, Tom Hart, Joe Chippetta, and others. In addition to the regular Art Show, Kevin Eastman’s Words & Pictures Museum set up a special exhibit of comic art.
A whimsical addition to the Exhibit Hall was the Trilogy Tour tree, featuring the characters and works of cartoonists and self-publishers Jeff Smith (Bone), Linda Medley (Castle Waiting), and Charles Vess (Book of Ballads and Sagas), who had banded together to do a summer convention tour. A number of celebrities came to Comic-Con to promote upcoming films, from Paul Verhoeven (Starship Troopers) and David Hasselhoff (Nick Fury) to Michael Jai White and John Leguizamo (Spawn), plus martial arts favorite Sammo Hung. The 20th anniversary of Star Wars was a big theme, with lots of programs and a gala party under the sails on Saturday night, and a Dave Dorman painted Souvenir Book cover. Fans boarded buses to pack the audience for the Masquerade, held in Golden Hall at the old CPAC, where increasingly sophisticated costumes and presentations garnered prizes from sponsors, a preview of the modern-day Comic-Con Masquerade.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP ROW LEFT: Comic book artists and longtime friends Ramona Fradon (left) and Marie Severin.

RIGHT: A huge Spawn inflatable in the Sails Pavilion for the 1997 movie.

MIDDLE: A look from above at the Comic-Con Exhibit Hall.

BOTTOM LEFT: Patrick McDonnell’s Mutts salutes the 20th anniversary of Star Wars.

BOTTOM RIGHT: This large figure of Bone played lookout at the top of the tree in the Trilogy Tour booth.

THIS PAGE, TOP: Twenty years of Star Wars was the theme, and this triptych of three of the big original characters by Dave Dorman was the Souvenir Book cover.

THIS PAGE, BOTTOM LEFT: You got two big images—front and back—with this year’s Alfred E. Neuman meets the DC Comics Trinity official Comic-Con T-shirt!
A panel and signing by Joss Whedon and most of the Buffy the Vampire Slayer cast attracted mobs of fans. Similarly, fans of Sailor Moon creator Naoko Takeuchi were out in full force—and in cosplay. Themes included the 20th anniversary of Elfquest, Superman’s 60th birthday, and Comics for Girls and Boys. Director John Carpenter talked about his new film, Vampires, and fan-favorite star Patrick McDaniel discussed The Avengers (the popular 1960s British TV series). The International Pavilion in the Exhibit Hall focused on Italian comics, helping to emphasize Comic-Con’s worldwide scope. The Eisner Awards moved up a notch in sophistication, with a multimedia slide show and live video, while the Masquerade had a record turnout for its first presentation when it moved “home” to the Convention Center. One of the first successful Marvel movies, Blade, held a party Saturday night after the Masquerade. Charles Brownstein was hired as Comic-Con’s first full-time director of programming.
1999 marked Comic-Con’s 30th event. Programming themes included the 50th anniversary of Walt Kelly’s Pogo, the 60th anniversary of Batman, the 10th anniversary of Neil Gaiman’s Sandman, “The Graphic Novel Comes of Age,” “Comics Verité” (nonfiction comics), and “The Animation Renaissance.” Hollywood continued with its increased interest in reaching the show’s attendees. Presentations included a look at The Blair Witch Project with actress Heather Donahue, behind the scenes of Farscape, and a program on the making of Iron Giant, with director Brad Bird and a relatively unknown actor named Vin Diesel (the voice of the Iron Giant), just a few short months after he first became fast and furious. Mark Evanier kept expanding the number of panels he hosted, including several Golden and Silver Age panels, guest spotlights, and the annual Jack Kirby tribute, a feat he magically performs to this day, 20 years later.
"WE HAVE A HULK Toucan."

According to Wikipedia: "Toucans are members of the Neotropical near passerine bird family Ramphastidae. The Ramphastidae are brightly marked birds and have large, often-colorful bills. The family includes over forty different species."

Sometime in the mid-1980s, Comic-Con adopted the Toucan as an official logo. As artist Rick Geary explained: “I was asked to do a logo of some kind, and I came up with the Toucan. Actually, it wasn’t meant to be specifically a toucan, just a funny bird with a big beak.” Rick’s “funny bird” was a part of Comic-Con until 1995, appearing in publications, the occasional embroidered sweatshirt, and in advertising, both locally and in comics. In 1995, Comic-Con added “International” to its name and the iconic eye logo was created.

In 2009, for the 40th anniversary of Comic-Con, we asked Rick to bring back the bird, and he was featured on the cover of the Souvenir Book, perched atop the El Cortez Hotel (now a condo building) in his newly-adopted superhero garb. And then in 2012, when our official website, www.comic-con.org, was redesigned and revamped, Toucan became the name for our new official blog.

Rick generated a whole slew of new drawings (some of them seen here for the first time), and the Toucan once again became a part of the Comic-Con family. (Someone in the office actually named him, too: Stan.) Since emerging from his self-imposed exile, Stan the Toucan has appeared on official Comic-Con T-shirts, pins, tiki mugs, and—of course—on our blog on a regular basis.
TOP ROW: Other Toucans created by Geary include (left to right): Movie Toucan, TV Toucan, and Book Toucan.

ABOVE: A button given out at a panel during Comic-Con in 2013, commemorating the launch of the new blog.

MIDDLE: One of our favorites: Spaceman Toucan.

BELOW: Two versions of Professor Toucan: (left) “I will be in my office on Wednesday, but not Thursday” Ivy League Professor, and Graduation Professor. Plus Cosplay Toucan on the far right.