

California Studios Upgrade for TV Shows



Amy Graves/Wireimage

Occidental Entertainment Group's new sound stage in Hollywood.

By Maura Webber Sadovi

Television shows have come a long way from the “The Brady Bunch” era when many popular sitcom plots played out in a family living room and typically required fewer and smaller stages to produce.

Today the movie-like quality of many television productions is pressuring some owners of stages to upgrade their offerings to better compete for tenants and keep pace with other states and countries vying for the business.

The latest example: Hollywood's Occidental Entertainment Group just added a \$12 million new stage to an iconic Hollywood lot that dates back to 1913. The Carlyle Group private-equity firm also poured about \$20 million in upgrades to a Manhattan Beach, Calif. film production campus known as MBS Media Campus after acquiring it in 2007. (MBS Media Campus was featured in [today's Deal of the Week.](#))

Craig Darian, Occidental's chief executive officer, is still looking for a tenant for its new 14,000-square-foot sound stage and acknowledges that demand for stage space has slipped since the company first conceived the project roughly two years ago. But

even in today's uncertain financial times, Mr. Darian says to remain viable his firm had little choice but to proceed with the construction that it financed itself. "This was not elective surgery, it was mandatory surgery," says Mr. Darian.

The company's new stage expands Occidental Studios Main Lot, a roughly 3 ½ acre property where early film stars like Mary Pickford once worked. Before the addition, Mr. Darian says the lot's stage offerings were not enough to keep the production of Showtime's "The United States of Tara," which relocated to a larger facility after filming the pilot and its first season on Occidental's property.

The rising use of such techniques as the computer-generated imagery, seen in films like the 3-D science fiction epic "Avatar," is also weighing on the minds of sound stage owners as they consider capital improvements. "Whether or not stages are going to be used as they have in years gone by, the answer is probably 'no,'" says Mr. Darian.