



LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HEARING DATE: DECEMBER 2, 2020

Filing Date: November 4, 2020
Case No.: 2020-010196LBR
Business Name: Bimbo's 365 Club
Business Address: 1025 Columbus Avenue
Zoning: NCD (NORTH BEACH NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL) Zoning District
40-X Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 0050/004
Applicant: Michael Cerchiai
1025 Columbus Ave
Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Located In: District 3
Staff Contact: Katherine Wilborn - 628-652-7355
Katherine.Wilborn@sfgov.org

Recommendation: Adopt a Resolution to Recommend Approval

Business Description

Bimbo's 365 Club (often referred to as "Bimbo's") is a nighttime entertainment venue established by Agostino Giuntoli and Monk Young in 1931, during prohibition. The original business was a supper-theater and secret speakeasy called the "365 Club," located at 365 Market street, where it derives its namesake. The 365 Club was under dual ownership until Agostino Giuntoli (known as "Mr.Bimbo," a diminutive of "Bambino," which is Italian for boy) bought out Young's share in 1936 and established "Bimbo's 365 Club" as a family-owned business. Three generations later, Bimbo's is still owned and operated by the family. Bimbo's relocated in 1951 to its current location, 1025 Columbus Avenue, which contains an Art Deco-style building designed by Timothy Pflueger in 1931 for a competing club, Bal Tabarin. One of the most notable features of the interiors is "Dolphina, the girl in the fishbowl" feature behind the bar. The 1960s saw a decline in the nightlife scene, as televisions became more prominent, and Mr. Bimbo retired in 1969. Due to these factors, the club saw a brief hiatus until reopening in 1970s as a private event space, managed by Mr.Bimbo's son-in-law, Graziano Cerichiai. Starting in the early 80s and continuing to today, Bimbo's now serves both private and public events, concert shows, and performances in a chic venue, known for its seductive interiors that are evocative of the club's prohibition-era beginnings.

Beyond hundreds of performances and live shows by major artists over the course of a near-century, Bimbo's has also hosted local events like the San Francisco Film Festival and the San Francisco Jazz Festival (which has since evolved into SFJazz). Several events for schools, businesses, and nonprofits have used Bimbo's as a space to benefit local, regional, and international charitable organizations. As one of the oldest surviving nightclubs, Bimbo's has struck the balance of remaining relevant and dynamic in a changing entertainment industry, while keeping its historic charm and purpose over 89 years.

The business is located at 1025 Columbus Avenue, a Category A (Historic Resource Present) structure on the western side of Columbus Avenue, between Houston and Chestnut Street, on the border of the Russian Hill and North Beach Neighborhoods. It is within the North Beach NCD (Neighborhood Commercial District) Zoning District, a 40-X Height and Bulk District, and the North Beach Special Use District. 1025 Columbus Avenue was included in the LGBTQ Historic Context Statement (as a property associated with sex tourism during WWII (prior to Bimbo's occupation) and drag performances in the mid-1960s), and was identified as a California Register-eligible and National Register-eligible property through the North Beach Historic Survey in 1984. The property is located within an ongoing Neighborhood Commercial Corridors Historic Resources Survey.

Staff Analysis

Review Criteria

1. *When was business founded?*

The business was founded in 1931.

2. *Does the business qualify for listing on the Legacy Business Registry? If so, how?*

Yes. Bimbo's 365 Club qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- a. Bimbo's has operated continuously in San Francisco for 89 years.
- b. Bimbo's has contributed to the history and identity of the Downtown, Russian Hill, and North Beach neighborhoods, as well as the whole of San Francisco.
- c. Bimbo's is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the organization.

3. *Is the business associated with a culturally significant art/craft/cuisine/tradition?*

Yes. The business is associated with the entertainment industry.

4. *Is the business or its building associated with significant events, persons, and/or architecture?*

Yes. 1025 Columbus Avenue is associated with Master Architect, Timothy Pflueger, and was identified as a Historic Resource (Planning Department status code of "A") eligible for listing on the California Register and National Register. The property is also located within the boundaries of an ongoing Neighborhood Commercial Corridors Historic Resources Survey and the North Beach Historic Survey. Bimbo's Club has also been a host to many significant artists, performances, local celebrities, and politicians. One of the original

showgirls employed by Bimbo's was Rita Hayward. Some of the most notable patrons and performers of Bimbo's have been: Smokey Robinson, Marvin Gaye, Glen Campbell, Adele, Charo, Margaret Cho, The Tubes, Bette Midler, Robin Williams, Herb Caen, and former Mayor George Moscone, just to name a few who have frequented the live stage over the course of Bimbo's near-century of operations.

5. *Is the property associated with the business listed on a local, state, or federal historic resource registry?*

No, the property is not formally listed; however, 1025 Columbus Avenue has a Planning Department Historic Resource status code of "A" (Historic Resource Present) because of the survey evaluation from North Beach Historic Survey, which identified the structure as eligible for both the California and National Registries. The property is also significant for its association with the LGBTQ community, as evaluated in the LGBTQ Historic Context Statement.

6. *Is the business mentioned in a local historic context statement?*

Yes, the business and the property are identified in the LGBTQ Historic Context Statement. The building is associated with exotic tourism during WWII (1940s, when Bal Tabarin was the occupant, before Bimbo's moving to the space in 1951) and the business was identified as a venue for Drag Theater companies, such as the *Camptown Players*, *Yonkers Production Company*, and *City Players*, to host drag performances in the mid-1960s.

7. *Has the business been cited in published literature, newspapers, journals, etc.?*

Yes. For almost a century, Bimbo's 365 Club has remained a well-publicized San Francisco institution. Bimbo's has served as an iconic backdrop for major films (including *Bullitt* ('68), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* ('78), and *Golden Gate* ('94), just to name a few) and has taken center stage in San Francisco tourist guides (including a 1939 publication titled "*Where to Sin in San Francisco*"). Herb Caen's beloved column often featured Bimbo's, and Caen covered Mr. Bimbo's retirement and passing in 1969 and 1992, respectively. The club has been featured in many historical and architectural books that note Bimbo's significance in the history of entertainment, arts, design, and North Beach culture. Bimbo's has featured many notable artists since 1931, but just as often, the club itself has been the feature of many publications. For a complete list of notable publications, features, and articles, as well as important persons who have attended Bimbo's over the years, please see the (attached) Legacy Business Application.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business

Location(s) associated with the business:

Current Locations:

- 1025 Columbus Avenue (1951 – Present)

Previous (No Longer Extant) Locations:

- 365 Market Street (1931 – 1951)

Recommended by Applicant

- Long-term presence and commitment to maintaining its core values of accessibility, quality, and impeccable customer service to its community
- Serving both a local and international community, as well as a community defined by the entertainment

industry as a valued event space for famous clientele as well as a number of local groups, schools, institutions, and charities.

- Bimbo's neon signage, marquee, and façade along Columbus Avenue, which have remained largely unchanged in 70 years.
- "Dolphina," or the "girl in the fishbowl," the related systems to create the illusion, and her associated imagery (etched mirrors and windows, branded menus, promotional material, ephemera, and the statue of Dolphina that greets guests in the lobby).
- The women's restroom and furniture, the kitchen and Cantina, and the artwork and decoration, as they are presently (and have been since the 1960s).
- Quality entertainment at an accessible value with top-notch service

Additional Recommended by Staff

- Maintaining the historical records and images on the website, as a living historical record of Bimbo's 365 Club.

Basis for Recommendation

The Department recommends the Historic Preservation Commission adopt a resolution recommending the business listed above be adopted by the Small Business Commission to the Legacy Business Registry.

ATTACHMENTS

Draft Resolution

Legacy Business Registry Application:

- Application Review Sheet
- Section 1 – Business / Applicant Information
- Section 2 – Business Location(s)
- Section 3 – Disclosure Statement
- Section 4 – Written Historical Narrative
 - Criterion 1 – History and Description of Business
 - Criterion 2 – Contribution to Local History
 - Criterion 3 – Business Characteristics
- Contextual Photographs and Background Documentation



HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DRAFT RESOLUTION NO. ###

HEARING DATE: DECEMBER 2, 2020

Case No.: 2020-010196LBR
Business Name: Bimbo's 365 Club
Business Address: 1025 Columbus Avenue
Zoning: NCD (NORTH BEACH NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL) Zoning District
40-X Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 0050/004
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Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Located In: District 3
Staff Contact: Katherine Wilborn - 628-652-7355
Katherine.Wilborn@sfgov.org

ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR 1025 COLUMBUS AVE CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 1025 COLUMBUS AVE, BLOCK/LOT 0050/004.

WHEREAS, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has contributed to the City's history and identity; and

WHEREAS, the subject business is committed to maintaining the traditions that define the business; and

WHEREAS, at a duly noticed public hearing held on December 2, 2020, the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed documents, correspondence and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry nomination.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the **Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends** that Bimbo's 365 Club qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) as it has operated for 30 or more years and has continued to contribute to the community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the **Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends** safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions for Bimbo's 365 Club.

Location(s):

Current Locations:

- 1025 Columbus Avenue (1951 – Present)

Previous (No Longer Extant) Locations:

- 365 Market Street (1931 – 1951)

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Long-term presence and commitment to maintaining its core values of accessibility, quality, and impeccable customer service to its community
- Serving both a local and international community, as well as a community defined by the entertainment industry as a valued event space for famous clientele as well as a number of local groups, schools, institutions, and charities.
- Bimbo's neon signage, marquee, and façade along Columbus Avenue, which have remained largely unchanged in 70 years.
- "Dolphina," or the "girl in the fishbowl," the related systems to create the illusion, and her associated imagery (etched mirrors and windows, branded menus, promotional material, ephemera, and the statue of Dolphina that greets guests in the lobby).
- The women's restroom and furniture, the kitchen and Cantina, and the artwork and decoration, as they are presently (and have been since the 1960s).
- Quality entertainment at an accessible value with top-notch service
- Maintaining the historical records and images on the website, as a living historical record of Bimbo's 365 Club.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission's findings and recommendations are made solely for the purpose of evaluating the subject business's eligibility for the Legacy Business Registry, and the Historic Preservation Commission makes no finding that the subject property or any of its features constitutes a historical resource pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5(a).

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the **Historic Preservation Commission hereby directs** its Commission Secretary to transmit this Resolution and other pertinent materials in the case file to the Office of Small Business December 2, 2020.

Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

Resolution No. ###
December 2, 2020

CASE NO. 2020-010196LBR
1025 COLUMBUS AVE

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ADOPTED: December 2, 2020



Legacy Business Registry

Application Review Sheet

Application No.: LBR-2019-20-032
Business Name: Bimbo's 365 Club
Business Address: 1025 Columbus Ave.
District: District 3
Applicant: Michael Cerchiai, Owner/General Manager
Nomination Date: February 11, 2020
Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin

CRITERION 1: Has the applicant has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?

☒ Yes ☐ No

365 Market Street from 1931 to 1951 (20 years)
1025 Columbus Avenue from 1951 to Present (69 years)

CRITERION 2: Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?

☒ Yes ☐ No

CRITERION 3: Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?

☒ Yes ☐ No

NOTES: N/A

DELIVERY DATE TO HPC: November 4, 2020

Richard Kurylo
Program Manager, Legacy Business Program

Legacy Business Program

Office of Small Business
City Hall Room 140
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102
(415) 554-6680
legacybusiness@sfgov.org
www.legacybusiness.org



Member, Board of Supervisors
District 3



City and County of San Francisco

AARON PESKIN
佩斯金 市參事

February 11, 2020

Director Regina Dick-Endrizzi
San Francisco Office of Small Business
City Hall, Room 110
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place

Dear Director Dick-Endrizzi:

It is my honor and privilege to nominate Bimbo's 365 Club for inclusion on the Legacy Business Registry.

Bimbo's 365 Club has operated under the same ownership of the founding family since it opened its doors during Prohibition in 1921. It began at 365 Market and has contributed greatly to the culture of North Beach since 1951. The Club has remained a vital entertainment establishment in the city through decades of changing tastes, from its inception as a premier supper club through the disco dancing days of the 1970s and into today's role hosting artists, celebrities, and corporate and community events.

Bimbo's 365 Club will be honored as the featured nominated Legacy Business at the 2020 Heritage Society Gala on May 1, 2020. The Club's 90-year history and its commitment to being a gathering place and cultural cornerstone qualifies for inclusion on the Registry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Aaron Peskin".

Aaron Peskin

Cc: Richard Kurylo, Legacy Business Program

Section One:

Business / Applicant Information.

Please provide the following information:

- The name, mailing address and other contact information of the business;
- The name of the person who owns the business. For businesses with multiple owners, identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business;
- The name, title and contact information of the applicant;
- The business's San Francisco Business Account Number and entity number with the Secretary of State, if applicable.

NAME OF BUSINESS:	
Bimbo's 365 Club	
BUSINESS OWNER(S) (Identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business):	
Michael Cerchiai, Gino Cerchiai, Graziano Cerchiai	
CURRENT BUSINESS ADDRESS:	TELEPHONE NUMBER:
1025 Columbus Ave. San Francisco, CA 94133	(415) 474-0365
	EMAIL ADDRESS:
	info@bimbos365club.com
MAILING ADDRESS – STREET ADDRESS:	MAILING ADDRESS – CITY AND STATE:
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Same as Business Address	
	MAILING ADDRESS – ZIP CODE:
WEBSITE ADDRESS:	
www.bimbos365club.com	
FACEBOOK PAGE:	
https://www.facebook.com/Bimbos365Club	
TWITTER NAME:	
https://twitter.com/Bimbos365Club	
APPLICANT'S NAME:	APPLICANT'S TELEPHONE NUMBER:
Michael Cerchiai	
APPLICANT'S TITLE:	APPLICANT'S EMAIL ADDRESS:
Owner/General Manager	
SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS ACCOUNT NUMBER:	
0003188	
SECRETARY OF STATE ENTITY NUMBER (If applicable):	

Section Two:

Business Location(s).

List the business address of the original San Francisco location, the start date of business and the dates of operation at the original location. Check the box indicating whether the original location of the business in San Francisco is the founding location of the business. If the business moved from its original location and has had additional addresses in San Francisco, identify all other addresses and the dates of operation at each address. For businesses with more than one location, list the additional locations in section three of the narrative.

ORIGINAL SAN FRANCISCO ADDRESS	ZIP CODE	START DATE OF BUSINESS
365 Market Street	94111	1931
IS THIS LOCATION THE FOUNDING LOCATION OF THE BUSINESS?	DATES OF OPERATION AT THIS LOCATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	1931-1951	

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
1025 Columbus Avenue	94133	Start: 1951 End: current

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start: End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start: End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start: End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start: End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start: End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start: End:

Section Three:

Disclosure Statement.

San Francisco Taxes, Business Registration, Licenses, Labor Laws and Public Information Release.

This section is verification that all San Francisco taxes, business registration and licenses are current and complete, and there are no current violations of San Francisco labor laws. This information will be verified. A business deemed not current with all San Francisco taxes, business registration and licenses, or has current violations of San Francisco labor laws, will not be eligible to apply for grants through the Legacy Business Program.

In addition, we are required to inform you that all information provided in the application will become subject to disclosure under the California Public Records Act.

Please read the following statements and check each to indicate that you agree with the statement. Then sign below in the space provided.

- ☒ I am authorized to submit this application on behalf of the business.
- ☒ I attest that the business is current on all of its San Francisco tax obligations.
- ☒ I attest that the business's business registration and any applicable regulatory license(s) are current.
- ☒ I attest that the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement (OLSE) has not determined that the business is currently in violation of any of the City's labor laws, and that the business does not owe any outstanding penalties or payments ordered by the OLSE.
- ☒ I understand that documents submitted with this application may be made available to the public for inspection and copying pursuant to the California Public Records Act and San Francisco Sunshine Ordinance.
- ☒ I hereby acknowledge and authorize that all photographs and images submitted as part of the application may be used by the City without compensation.
- ☒ I understand that the Small Business Commission may revoke the placement of the business on the Registry if it finds that the business no longer qualifies, and that placement on the Registry does not entitle the business to a grant of City funds.

Michael Cerchiai

10/21/2020



Name (Print):

Date:

Signature:

BIMBO'S 365 CLUB

Section 4: Written Historical Narrative

CRITERION 1

a. Provide a short history of the business from the date the business opened in San Francisco to the present day, including the ownership history. For businesses with multiple locations, include the history of the original location in San Francisco (including whether it was the business's founding and or headquartered location) and the opening dates and locations of all other locations.

Bimbo's 365 Club (also referred to as "Bimbo's" or "the club") was opened in 1931, under the name 365 Club, as a supper theater and entertainment venue at 365 Market Street. Founded during the Great Depression, the club was intended as an escape for its visitors, and with Prohibition (1920-1933) still in full swing, the 365 Club also served as a speakeasy. Since the 1930s, the club has also boasted the singular attraction of the "Girl in the Fishbowl," an illusion where a small, naked woman appears to be swimming in the fishbowl behind the bar.

From 1931 to 1936, the business was run as a partnership between Agostino "Bimbo" Giuntoli and Monk Young. The "Bimbo" nickname started years earlier when Agostino worked for Monk Young, and Young's inability to pronounce Agostino's name caused him to instead call him Bimbo, a diminutive of "Bambino," which is Italian for boy. In 1936, Giuntoli, or "Mr. Bimbo" as he became widely known, bought out Monk Young, and the club, which became known as Bimbo's 365 Club, became a family business.

In 1951, Bimbo's 365 Club moved to its current location at 1025 Columbus Avenue in North Beach, taking over the Art Deco style building that had been built for the Bal Tabarin, a competing club, by the architect Timothy Pflueger in 1930-1931.

The growing popularity of television and nightlife dance clubs in the 1960s was to the detriment of supper theater clubs, which offered two to three shows nightly, and Mr. Bimbo chose to retire in 1969, closing the club after a last New Year's Eve event. However, the club's popularity created immediate demand for its use as a private rental venue for performances, fundraisers, concerts, and dinners; and Bimbo's first private event occurred only days into the new year. In the first few months of 1970, Bimbo's 365 Club was re-opened with a new business format for private events.

In the 1980s and 1990s, under the management of the third generation of the family, the club returned to active management, offering public performances as well as private events. Today, Bimbo's 365 Club books concerts, shows, and performances for the public and continues to be available for private events.

b. Describe any circumstances that required the business to cease operations in San Francisco for more than six months?

The business has never truly been closed, but rather has had slow periods with inactivity. While Mr. Bimbo's retirement on December 31, 1969, was intended to close the club, instead Bimbo's 365 Club transitioned from a business model with nightly dinner theater shows to a rental venue supplemented with periodic scheduled concerts and performances.

c. Is the business a family-owned business? If so, give the generational history of the business.

The generational history of Bimbo's 365 Club is not easily defined, as family members have always been involved in the club at some level, whether washing dishes, cooking, helping with daily management, or merely celebrating family events and personal milestones at Bimbo's.

In November of 1953, Mr. Bimbo's son-in-law, Graziano Cerchiai, began working in the kitchen, purchasing produce and assisting the chef. By mid-1954, Graziano started to take on administrative roles including managing reservations and payroll. Graziano worked by Agostino's side until December 31, 1969, when Agostino announced his "retirement." As the club transitioned to hosting private parties, Graziano stepped in to run the evolving business, allowing Agostino to remain in partial retirement until his death in 1992.

Graziano was joined by his sons, Michael and Gino Cerchiai, who started working at Bimbo's full-time in 1982 and 1993, respectively. In the 1980s, the club returned to active management of offering public performances and shows booked by the Cerchiai family. Though Graziano is now semi-retired and daily management is handled by Michael and Gino, Graziano remains involved in the club's operations today.

d. Describe the ownership history when the business ownership is not the original owner or a family-owned business.

The ownership history of Bimbo's 365 Club is as follows:

1931 to 1936:	Agostino "Bimbo" Giuntoli and Monk Young
1936 to present:	Bimbo's 365 Club created as a corporation owned solely by Agostino "Bimbo" Giuntoli and his family. Agostino Giuntoli passed in 1992 and the Club is owned and operated by his son-in-law Graziano Cerchiai, and his grandsons Michael and Gino Cerchiai to this day.

e. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30 years, the applicant will need to provide documentation of the existence of the business prior to current ownership to verify it has been in operation for 30+ years. Please use the list of supplemental documents and/or materials as a guide to help demonstrate the existence of the business prior to current ownership.

Documentation of the existence of the business verifying it has been in operation for 30+ years is provided in this Legacy Business Registry application.

f. Note any other special features of the business location, such as, if the property associated with the business is listed on a local, state, or federal historic resources registry.

The current location of Bimbo's 365 Club at 1025 Columbus Avenue was built from 1930-1931 and designed by the architect Timothy Pflueger, a major figure in Art Deco architecture in San Francisco. Originally built for the Bal Tabarin, a competitor of the early 365 Club, the building was designed to evoke an exotic setting, which was a popular theme for nightclubs and entertainment venues at the turn of the 20th century. Constructed during the Great Depression and Prohibition, the building's design was crafted to be an escape from everyday concerns. With the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, Pflueger was re-hired by the Bal Tabarin to design a bar for the club.

The building is listed as a historic resource by the San Francisco Planning Department, but is not listed as a city designated landmark, nor is it on the National Register of Historic Places or the California Register of Historic Resources. The building was included in a 1984 survey of North Beach by the Planning Department and based on the survey's findings appears to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or the California Register of Historic Resources.

CRITERION 2

a. Describe the business's contribution to the history and/or identity of the neighborhood, community or San Francisco.

First opened during the Great Depression and Prohibition, the 365 Club invited guests to forget their troubles, eat well, and enjoy themselves while they were entertained by comedy acts, showgirls, singers, and performers. As one of the oldest surviving nightclubs in San Francisco, Bimbo's 365 Club is a lasting link to San Francisco's history in entertainment. As a speakeasy that also initially offered illegal gambling in a back room, the club navigated the fine line between legal entertainment and illegal alcohol and gambling, surviving periodic raids. Nightclubs and entertainment spaces were a large component of the San Francisco economy during World War II and provided an important space for servicemen on leave to socialize and mingle. The business's move to North Beach in 1951 reflected the growing identity of that neighborhood as an entertainment district, particularly as the anti-vice crusades of the late 1940s shut down many businesses in the Tenderloin, the International Settlement (previously the Barbary Coast), and downtown.

The history of Bimbo's 365 Club also represents larger trends in the entertainment industry, transitioning from a dinner show entertainment space to a venue for limited run performances. Additionally, Bimbo's has kept abreast of popular trends in the music industry and has provided a space for some of the less mainstream entertainment trends, like the Acid Jazz and Swing Dance movements of the 1990s.

b. Is the business (or has been) associated with significant events in the neighborhood, the city, or the business industry?

Bimbo's 365 Club is a space that is defined by its use for public events and performances. Beyond its involvement in the hundreds of performances by major artists that stretch throughout its 90 years of business, the club is also used for events like the San Francisco Film

Festival and charity events that serve schools, businesses, causes, and nonprofits that are local, regional, and international. The club was also a pivotal location for the spread of the Swing Dance and Acid Jazz movements of the mid-1990s, and provided a venue for the San Francisco Jazz Festival (previously called Jazz in the City) run by Randall Kline, which has since evolved into SFJazz.

c. Has the business ever been referenced in an historical context? Such as in a business trade publication, media, or historical documents?

Bimbo's 365 Club has been referenced in a wide variety of contexts from early tourist guides and advertising, to media coverage of concerts and comedy shows, events for film, music, and local issues, and has also received attention as a San Francisco institution.

Some of the well-known guides to feature Bimbo's include the 1939 *Where to Sin In San Francisco*, which called it "The Complete Hot-Spot," and *Herb Caen's San Francisco* (multiple editions since 1957), which listed Bimbo's as "the city's largest and plushiest night club, run in fine hang-the-expense style." Herb Caen's beloved column in the *San Francisco Chronicle* was also known to feature Bimbo's, and beyond mention of events and social news at Bimbo's, he covered both Mr. Bimbo's retirement in 1969 and eulogized his passing in 1992.

The club has also been featured in books on various topics, including: the architecture of Timothy Pflueger, the development of North Beach, the role of nightclubs in San Francisco, the growth of jazz in the city, and the graphic design of historic menus and contemporary concert posters. Bimbo's 365 Club was also mentioned in the LGBTQ Historic Context Statement (adopted by the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission in 2015) in references to WWII entertainment, drag performances, and disco.

Bimbo's 365 Club has been depicted in a number of films, including: *Bullitt* (1968), *Freebie and the Bean* (1974), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978), *The Presidio* (1988), *Golden Gate* (1994), and *Jack* (1996). Bimbo's was also used in the television series *The Chris Isaak Show*, as the "home base" of Chris Isaak; the exterior shots were filmed on location, while interiors were filmed on a sound stage. The club has also served as the location of a number of stand-up comedy recordings, including those of Paula Poundstone, Charles Pierce, Margaret Cho, and Natasha Leggero.

In 2014, Bimbo's 365 Club was recognized as one of the 100 legacy businesses listed by San Francisco Heritage in its online guide "Legacy Bars and Restaurants" and its accompanying interactive map; this list was created as a tool to recognize and safeguard the intangible heritage of San Francisco. The "Legacy Bars and Restaurants" project inspired the creation of the San Francisco Legacy Business Registry in 2015.

d. Is the business associated with a significant or historical person?

Bimbo's 365 Club is associated with a wide variety of important musicians, performers, dancers, politicians, and local celebrities. At its first location on Market Street, one of the showgirls was a young Rita Hayworth (née Rita Cansino). Since that time, the club has attracted famous

performers and musicians, including Smokey Robinson, Marvin Gaye, Glen Campbell, Adele, Charo, and The Tubes, as well as celebrities like Bette Midler and Robin Williams. Robin Williams performed a series of sold-out stand-up comedy shows in his return to the live stage directly after the tragedy of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. Bimbo's was also known for being frequented by well-known San Franciscans like Herb Caen and Mayor George Moscone, who was a friend of Mr. Bimbo, as well as those who attended many of the events, fundraisers, and dinners that were hosted at Bimbo's.

Since the 1980s, the Club has also hosted a number of important artists who were able to further develop their careers in the United States through an early engagement at Bimbo's 365 Club, this includes but not limited to: Adele, Beck, the Flaming Lips, Gad Elmaleh, Wanda Jackson, Air, Money Mark, Van Morrison, Guided by Voices, the Beta Band, Aimee Mann, Femi Kuti, White Stripes, Ben Harper, Norah Jones, Spiritualized, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Neko Case, Nancy Sinatra, Lisa Marie Presley, Cake, José González, Rodríguez, Andra Day, and Lee Fields.

e. How does the business demonstrate its commitment to the community?

The club's long-term presence, as well as its commitment to maintaining its core values of accessibility, quality, and impeccable customer service, demonstrates its continuing commitment to the community. Additionally, the club hosts a number of local fundraisers and benefits and tries to prioritize the support of other local businesses. In some cases this has included hosting events that benefit local businesses, such as "Jazz in the City" (the precursor to SFJazz), the Queen Isabella Pageant of previous Columbus Day celebrations, Lyle Tuttle's Tattoo Balls, or in recommending local businesses for catering, etc. The management of Bimbo's is also involved in working with neighboring businesses to ensure that area is safe, clean, and attractive for their customers and the broader community.

f. Provide a description of the community the business serves.

Bimbo's 365 Club serves both a local and international community, as well as a community defined by the entertainment industry and crosses geographic boundaries. As a valued event space, the club serves a number of local groups, schools, institutions, and charities, and has established long-term relationships with these repeat customers. This constituency is often local, but also represents larger groups. Additionally, due to its longtime branding and role in the entertainment world, the Bimbo's name has an international presence and serves an international community of musicians and performers, as well as concert attendees who are both local and international.

Additionally, a hyper-specific community has formed around Bimbo's that consists of the women who have previously been employed as the club's Dolphina, or the girl in the fishbowl. As a very select group of women, who included Donna Powers (a past Richmond City Council Member), there is an interest in who these Dolphinas were and are, and past Dolphinas have made their own community on social media.

g. Is the business associated with a culturally significant building/structure/site/object/interior?

Not only is the building that houses Bimbo's 365 Club an architecturally significant building by Timothy Pflueger, a well-known architect, but the building is culturally significant for its connections to its time as the Bal Tabarin (1931-1950) and as Bimbo's 365 Club (1951-present). As the Bal Tabarin, the club was significant as an example of the popular exotic night club scene of the 1930s and its role as a place of leisure and entertainment for servicemen on leave during WWII. As Bimbo's 365 Club, it is culturally significant for its association with evolving trends in the music and entertainment industries, and for associations with local history. The neon marquee on the building's exterior, the kitchen and Mr. Bimbo's Cantina, and Dolphina's fishbowl behind the bar (with its associated basement room) are significant spaces and objects associated with the business.

h. How would the community be diminished if the business were to be sold, relocated, shut down, etc.?

The closure of Bimbo's 365 Club would be a huge loss for both its local and international communities, as well as for the legacy of San Francisco's entertainment industry. The business has become an icon of the city in its nine decades of operation, and offers a rare and tangible link to the history of entertainment and leisure that originated in the difficult conditions of both Prohibition and the Great Depression. Bimbo's has remained a favorite location for community fundraisers and events, and its reputation for quality, care, and value has allowed for these relationships to last. Additionally, Bimbo's national and international reputation in the entertainment industry makes the club a sought-after venue that can draw popular artists and shows to the city.

CRITERION 3

a. Describe the business and the essential features that define its character.

Bimbo's neon signage and marquee along its Columbus Avenue facade have remained largely unchanged in the 70 years that the business has been at this location. These features are a significant part of the business's identity and have defined the public image of Bimbo's in North Beach.

On the interior, a number of features and spaces are important to the Bimbo's brand. Dolphina, or the "girl in the fishbowl" is one of the most important features of the business and has been a part of the club since its first location on Market Street. Created as a gimmick to draw patrons to the bar, the illusion of Dolphina and her fishbowl was described by the *New York Times* in 2011:

A catacomb of tunnels in the bowels of the club leads to a small room containing a rotating platform on which the live "mermaid" reclines, naked. A periscope with angled mirrors projects her image up into the fishbowl where it appears that a tiny mermaid, about six inches long, is floating in an underwater grotto.

Beyond the fishbowl itself (located behind the bar) and its underground room, Dolphina quickly became an essential symbol of Bimbo's and her image is used throughout the club: etched in mirrors and windows, and included on menus, promotional material, and ephemera. A statue of Dolphina, by the Italian sculptor Cesare Viviani, greets guests in the lobby.

Other spaces that define the image and historical identity of Bimbo's include the kitchen, Mr. Bimbo's Cantina, and the women's bathroom. The kitchen and its adjacent Cantina are special places where the legacy of Bimbo's and the personality of Mr. Bimbo are strongly felt. The club's original role as a supper club, and its reputation for always supplying a good meal at a reasonable price, made the kitchen a highly important space. While the kitchen is now used on occasion by caterers (regular dinner service ended in 1969), it remains much as it did in the 1960s, with copper pots and pans hanging over the stove, and espresso machines and glassware ready for use. A man with a big personality and a love of entertaining, Mr. Bimbo loved to reiterate his care for his work and the customer, and his kitchen is full of hand-painted signs with mottos, reminders, and phrases about service and quality.

Additionally, the Cantina, a gated room that is entered through the kitchen, served as a private dining room for important guests and close friends of Mr. Bimbo, and doubled as a wine cellar. The Cantina is decorated with repeating 365s, a mark of Mr. Bimbo's personal touch. As a firm believer in the value of publicity and branding, Mr. Bimbo was adept at building the club's brand, making it pervasive and highly recognizable.

The women's restroom is defined by its vintage décor and individual makeup stations with mirrors, wood paneling, and Lucite and Naugahyde chairs, and has become a much beloved feature of the club.

b. How does the business demonstrate a commitment to maintaining the historical traditions that define the business, and which of these traditions should not be changed in order to retain the business's historical character? (e.g., business model, goods and services, craft, culinary, or art forms)

As a family-run business, the current management remains deeply in touch with the history of the club and is dedicated to maintaining outstanding customer service while offering high quality artistic performances with a nightclub experience. Both Michael and Gino Cerchiai grew up eating, celebrating, living, and working around Bimbo's 365 Club and have maintained many of the traditions that define these early memories.

c. How has the business demonstrated a commitment to maintaining the special physical features that define the business? Describe any special exterior and interior physical characteristics of the space occupied by the business (e.g. signage, murals, architectural details, neon signs, etc.).

Bimbo's 365 Club has benefited from the consistency of being managed as a family-owned and family-run business. Very little has been altered in regard to the important features of the business. The neon marquee is lit nightly and receives regular maintenance; the kitchen and Cantina remain largely as they have always been; and the dedication to providing quality

entertainment at an accessible value, and with top-notch service, remains a cornerstone of the management approach. The family is committed to maintaining the legacy of Mr. Bimbo and what Bimbo's has stood for since its establishment in 1931.

d. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30 years; the applicant will need to provide documentation that demonstrates the current owner has maintained the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms. Please use the list of supplemental documents and/or materials as a guide to help demonstrate the existence of the business prior to current ownership.

Documentation that demonstrates the business has been an entertainment venue for 30+ years is included in this Legacy Business Registry application.

Bimbo's 365 Club
Section 5: Supplemental Historical Documents

1931-1950

Advertisements.

**365 Market Street location
(original location of the club)**



3RD ST.
MARKET

BIMBO SEZ: this isn't the most
TERRIFIC show in town
I'll stand on my head at
the corner of
3RD AND MARKET

Ruth Craven
Leo Diamond
Armando & Lita
Loyanna & Renard
Byton Dancers
Eleanor Christian
Joe Marcellino

Bimbo's 365 Club

365 MARKET ST. • GARFIELD 0365



**DON'T THINK I'M
GETTING HI-HAT
BUT** CONFIDENTIALLY
**MY NEW SHOW
IS EVEN BETTER
THAN THE LAST
ONE, BELIEVE ME!**

BIMBO SEZ

how's this for
a lineup ???
**DANNY BECK
LEO DIAMOND
DON AND BEVERLEY
RAYBURN GIRLS
MARCELLINO MUSIC**

Bimbo's 365 Club

365 MARKET STREET • GARFIELD 0365

1931-1950

Advertisements, continued.

The Smartest Show in Town!

THE TOPS IN NIGHT CLUB SHOW LIFE
Reservations GA. 0365

BIMBO PRESENTS
Pomeroy's Hollywood
STUDIO REVUE
featuring
Smash Hit cinema talent
"A Rhythmic Fantasy"
Adorable Girls

365 Club

365 MARKET STREET

GO WHERE THE CROWD GOES!

San Francisco has inherited a gay reputation for being one of America's outstanding glamour spots. Naturally you are interested in showing your out of town friends what really goes on in this much touted city after dark. Therefore, it is our earnest suggestion that you give utmost consideration to the 365 Club and all it has to offer as an entertainment, dancing, and dining showplace.

There is never a cover charge at the 365 Club and if you do not care to take a table, we have two cocktail lounges for your convenience. The shows go on at 9, 11, and 1. We advise you to telephone early for table reservations, GARfield 0365.

★ *Bimbo's* **365**
★ 365 MARKET ST.
★ GARFIELD 0365
THEATRE CAFE

**365 HAS COMPLIED 1000% WITH
THE NATION'S MOST STRINGENT
FIRE PROTECTION REGULATIONS**

<p>RUTH CRAVEN</p> <p>BILLY LYONS</p> <p>MARCIA & RENE GUNSETT</p> <p>GERALDINE ROSS</p> <p>ESQUIRE GIRLS</p> <p>JOE MARCELLINO</p>	<p>11th</p> <p>Anniversary Today!</p>	<p>DELUXE DINNER Assorted Hors d'Oeuvres Caviar on Ice Prime Rib with Green Grapes Sautéed Potatoes Pumpkin and Corn Dessert Ice Cream or Sherbet with Cake or Assorted Cheese with Crackers Butter Soft Tarts</p> <p>CHOICE OF SIXTEEN ENTREES</p>
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ONE PLACE WHERE YOU CAN ALWAYS GET A GOOD DINNER AND SEE A GOOD SHOW!!

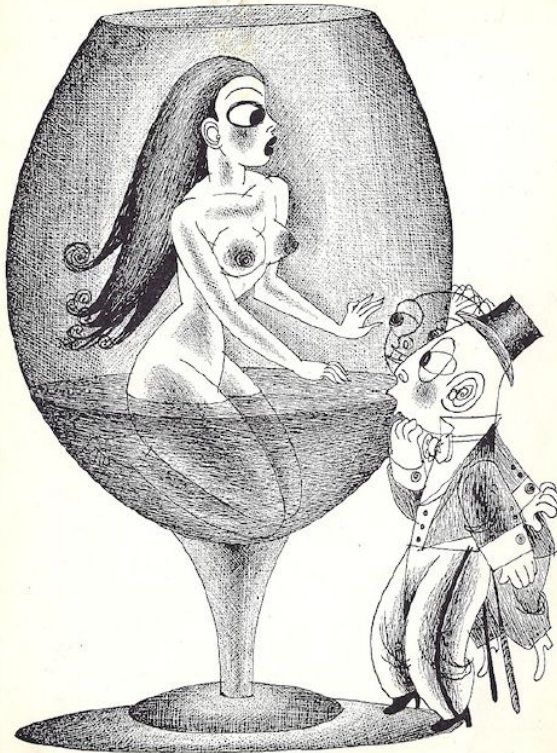
"ALL CAR LINES LEAD TO THE 365!" SAVE GAS SAVE TIRES—GO EARLY TONITE!

4 O'CLOCK COCKTAILS 5 O'CLOCK DINNER 6 O'CLOCK DANCING 7 O'CLOCK 1ST SHOW

NO TABLES HELD AFTER 7 P. M.

1939

Where to Sin in San Francisco, travel guide



... very naked ...

36

FOR THE MOOD CHOICE:

The Complete Hot-Spot

WHETHER SHE'S a new blonde, an old blonde, or no blonde at all, here's where to bring her when you feel she needs the bang of having been to a *night-club*.

The elevator man, the hat-check girls, the maitre d'hotel, the waiters, the MC, the chef, the bartender, the girls in the show . . . they all have that movie touch that you associate with the real thing. Smartly on their toes, gracious, affable . . . the Ah-Yes-Mr.-Big-Shot sort of thing. . . . They make you feel good.

You'll like the food, which is superb, because it was cooked by Bimbo. You'll like your drinks because they're good. You'll like the Girl-in-the-Fish-Bowl because she's very naked. You'll like the show, because it has been imported from Hollywood, with a full quota of wild, beautiful women with long legs. . . .

You'll like the expensive setting. You'll like the not-so-expensive check.

VITAL SINTISTICS

OPEN: 5 until you're ready to go home. (No drinks after 2, naturally.) FOOD: American by Bimbo. Tip: Try the roast pheasant. MAITRE D'HOTEL: Andy. BARCHIEF: Vic. HATS 70: Marie. SHOWS: 9, 11 and 1. SINTAX: Diners, \$1.75 to \$2.50. Minimum, \$1 per person.

365 Club

AT: 365 Market.

37

1940s

Bimbo's 365 Club on Market Street



**Fish tank at the bar at 365
Market Street**



**Dining area, stage, and
dance floor at 365 Market
Street**

Pre-1951

Various, Bimbo's 365 Club on Market Street



1951

Bimbo's 365 Club moves to 1025 Columbus Avenue

Home of the Girl in the Fishbowl

Bimbo's NEW 365 Club
THEATRE RESTAURANT

1025 COLUMBUS AVE.
WORLD'S BEST DINNER

GRAND OPENING
MONDAY, JULY 2nd

IT'S OUT-OF THIS WORLD!

NOWHERE in the world can you match the new 365 for breath-taking beauty, truly inspired food and a show that's so masterfully produced — you think you're on Broadway. Smart San Franciscans by the hundreds are making reservations now. The big topic of conversation about town is the opening of the new 365. You'll want to be among the first to see it for yourself. Phone now to assure a table . . . GARFIELD 1-0365.

Cocktails from 5; Dinner from 6; Dancing from 7; 1st Show--7:30

No Cover Charge



1951

Bimbo's 365 Club moves to 1025 Columbus Avenue, continued



Front facade prior to addition of concrete block over stained glass and brick around entrance

1952

Unveiling the statue of Dolphina

*Be one of the first
to see* **DOLPHINA** *★*



THE GIRL WITH
THE WORLD'S MOST
GORGEOUS BODY





*The Girl in the Fishbowl
Immortalized in White Marble*
created especially for Bimbo by Italy's
foremost sculptor, Cesare Viviani

July
THURSDAY
17
FRIDAY
18
SATURDAY
19
MONDAY
21
TUESDAY
22
WEDNESDAY
23
COME EARLY

select the night that suits you best and make a reservation...





COCKTAILS IN THE DOLPHIN ROOM ✧ THE TERRACE LOUNGE ✧ THE TROPHY ROOM




WORLD'S BEST DINNER ✧ HOME OF THE GIRL IN THE FISHBOWL ✧ 1ST SHOW 7:30

**IN ALL THE WORLD—
NO OTHER NIGHT CLUB
COMPARES TO THE 365!**

Actually this is more than our first anniversary. San Francisco has been the home of the 365 Club for over 20 years. But July 17th marks the end of our first year in the new location. And the beginning of an even greater year to come! New thrills such as Dolphina — sculptured in Italy from the purest of white marble. She will be unveiled for the first time on anniversary night: a tempting mermaid astride a dolphin — life size. Catch your first glimpse of Dolphina, over a cocktail, in the "Dolphin Room."

EVEN MORE SPECTACULAR SHOWS
Dorothy Darben has been producing the 365 revues since opening night. Beyond the whiplash of a doubt, she is the outstanding creator of smart choreography in America today. She will continue giving you the last word in spectacular costumes, gorgeous dancing adorables and clever ideas set to rhythms. The top alitery attractions of the show world will share the 365 spotlight in the second year of 365's whirlwind history.

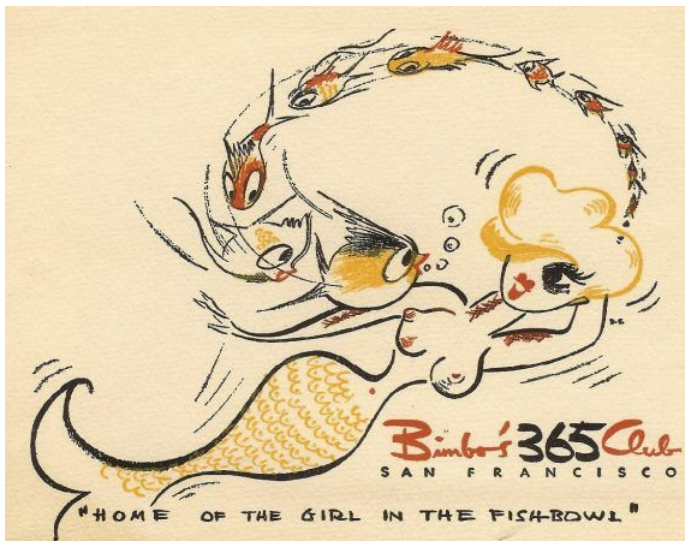
A SUPERB PLACE FOR DANCING
Years of catering to the dancing whims of more than a million 365 guests has taught 365's maestro, Derle Knox, what tunes and what tempos the average dancer likes best. The top musicians in California are on Bimbo's dance podium. Their show music is incomparable, too. You'll find yourself dancing every dance at 365!

A TRADITIONAL SAN FRANCISCO DINNER
Bimbo is known the world over for his "World's Best Dinner." Course for course, and dollar for dollar, you'll never get another dinner at any night club that even comes close to 365's. A fine staff of chefs and waiters work as a team to give you a dinner you'll never forget. Bimbo started his ritzy career as a chef. He not only knows how to obtain the best of food — he is a master at knowing how it should be prepared and served.

MAGNIFICENT WORKS OF ART
The moment you let the 365 doorman have your car, your eyes tell you that you are entering the jewel-box of smart dinner and supper clubs. Many new and especially created paintings will adorn the Terrace Lounge and Dolphin Room walls starting anniversary night, the works of Julian Ritter through the Maxwell Galleries.

Undated

Various



Various

Mr. Bimbo at Bimbo's 365 Club



1954
Showgirls at Bimbo's 365 Club



1955

Advertisement & sidewalk dining

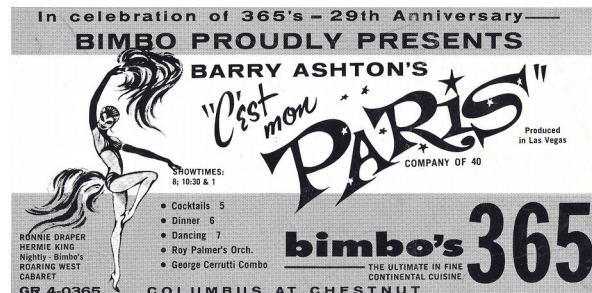
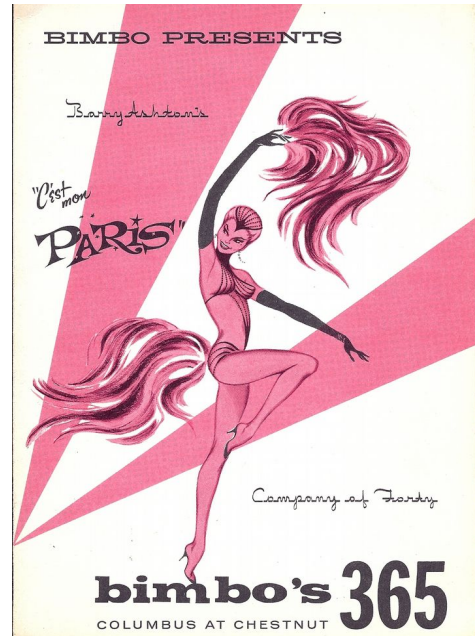


Left: Advertisement

Right: Sidewalk dining during a heat wave

1960s

New stage and various advertisements



Undated

Agostino "Mr. Bimbo" in the Cantina with friends



1969

Herb Caen on Mr. Bimbo's Retirement, *San Francisco Chronicle*

26 San Francisco Chronicle Fri., Dec. 26, 1969

HERB CAEN

Then and Now

DURING THE great depression, nobody had any money and everybody seemed to be having a lot of fun. Today, everybody has money and nobody is having any fun at all, and why is that, Doc? Kindly explain.

THESE PERISHABLE thoughts occurred to me as I lunched with Agostino (Bimbo) Giuntoli, who has had a lot to do with what passes for fun in this town. At 66, he is a handsome man, his hair thick and only slightly gray. He sports a neatly-trimmed moustache of the type fancied by movie heroes of the Thirties — say, Antonio Moreno. A diamond-studded "365" sparkles in his well-tailored lapel (with hand-picked edges). When he rounds out the picture with homburg at a jaunty angle, cashmere overcoat and gray spats, he is the embodiment of an American picture long faded: the immigrant boy who came here to look for gold in the streets, and found it.

LIKE MILLIONS before him, Agostino came here alone from his native village in Italy some 45 years ago. He entered the San Francisco scene on the ground floor: janitor at the Palace Hotel. Then he graduated to cook for the character named Monk Young in a speakeasy nearby on Market (Monk couldn't pronounce "Agostino" and dubbed him "Bimbo"). In 1931, the redoubtable team of Monk and Bimbo took over an upstairs loft at 365 Market and opened the 365 Club. Monk has since died, and now, 38 years later, the rich man named Agostino Giuntoli — rich in family, friends, honors and money — is preparing to call it quits. New Year's Eve is the last night in his pride and joy, the "new" 365 on Columbus Avenue. Slow fade, "The End," curtain.

WELL, SO WHAT? Night clubs come and go, don't they? True, but the cliché, "end of an era," was never truer, for the 365 is/was a true night-club in a style we will never see here again. Chorus girls! The first local live nude—"The Girl in the Fishbowl." Jugglers, dance teams, standup comics, crooners, chantootsies, Stage Door Johns, a proper band in proper uniforms and a leader with a baton long enough for the Symphony. Multi-course dinners, Red Cap Sparkling, Burgundy in the silver bucket, and a nice-bucketed lady in a silver fox stole topped by a gardenia bought from the "pro" in the men's room. All over, done for. You may be dry-eyed but Bimbo, who talks like Henry Armetta and has a laugh that crackles like a shortwave radio, is crying. Of all the big clubs that once flourished in this city of long nights, only the 365 survived this long, and it hurts.

LOOKING BACK, it's hard to believe. During the depression, hardly anybody had two four-bits pieces to rub together, yet the town was jumping. Name bands in all the hotels. Griff Williams and Jimmy Walsh at the Edgewater Beach, at the edge of the Pacific. At Topsy's Roost, you entered by sliding down a proper slide to dance to Ellis Kimball. Joe Merello's Club Moderne, Papa Ricconi's Music Box, the Embassy at the Wharf, the lavish three-story Deauville on O'Farrell (Chaney & Fox, Eddie Fitzpatrick's band) and a dozen joints with shows that ran all night. Upstairs at O'Farrell and Stockton, a full-fledged gambling palace. When Hildegard opened in the Mark's Peacock Court, it was bigger than first night at the opera. Same for Sophie Tucker at Gerun & Martinelli's Bal Tabarin, now Bimbo's. Every other apartment house downtown had girls for hire, \$2 and up; Sally, Dolly and Jew Ida. The cops ran the town and, in retrospect, they ran it well. Bookies, pinballs and slot machines were everywhere. The buck was scarce but somehow everybody made one.

EVEN IN THIS setting, the old 365 on Market was special. You rode upstairs in a rickety elevator and stepped out into a big square bar, the best kind. The show room ran as late as the traffic would bear; a full show at 3 a.m. was not unusual. In a heavily-curtained back room that stayed open till dawn, pretty girls presided over high-dice tables, and that's where Bimbo made a good chunk of his fortune. "The house took all ties," he cackles. "That's all I needed, that little edge."

THREE THINGS finally beat Bimbo. "Jet planes, Las Vegas and TV," he enumerated as we fork-and-spooned the spaghetti at Julius' Castle the other noon. "In the old days, who had time to go anywhere? Now you get on a plane, boom, you're in Las Vegas in a few minutes. You see Frank Sinatra. At my joint, you see Joe Schlock. How can I fight those Vegas salaries? I don't blame people. I got a family place. I put in big acts I gotta raise prices and my customers say 'Bimbo, you can't do this to me, I'm part of the FAMILY.' Then there's TV. It ain't so good but it's free.

"I've been beating my head against the wall till I got headache. I don't mind throwing good money after bad, but now it's like throwing it off the Golden Gate Bridge. I don't wanna die broke. I know too many guys, they die and people say what a great fellow — when he had it, he spent it. Well, I had it and I spent it and I'm quitting while I still have a little left."

THEN HE SMILES his sunny smile. Turning to his son-in-law, Graziano Cerchiai, he beamed: "But the old days, kid, they were really something. Too bad you missed it." "Why?" shrugged Graziano. "If I'd been there, now I'd be as old as you are." So much for sentiment. It's deader than the night club business.

2010

Bimbo's 365 Club turns 80

SFGATE

<https://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/All-year-party-as-Bimbo-s-365-Club-turns-80-2517553.php>

All-year party as Bimbo's 365 Club turns 80

CATCHING UP WITH Michael Cerchiai

By Sam Whiting Published 4:00 am PST, Thursday, December 30, 2010



Catching up with Michael Cerchiai, on Wednesday Dec. 1, 2010, in San Francisco, Calif., who runs the night club Bimbo's, was opened by his grandfather 80 years ago. Cerchiai on the floor of the club.

Bimbo's 365 Club faces Columbus Avenue, but the action takes place on a side alley, behind a window that has bars on the outside and shutters on the inside. This is where **Michael Cerchiai**, 50, sits in the wood-paneled office that was his grandfather's - the place where he books acts and greets entertainers for this Old World nightclub in North Beach.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/01/us/dolphina-the-girl-in-a-fishbowl-swims-on-at-bimbos-365-club.html>

The New York Times

LOCAL INTELLIGENCE

Girl in a Fishbowl

By Louise Rafkin
Dec. 31, 2011



Party guests watch Dolphina (Celeste Knickerbocker) behind the main bar at Bimbo's 365 Club. Credit...Sarah Rice for The Bay Citizen

In a large fishbowl behind the bar at Bimbo's 365 Club, it looks as if a small naked woman is swimming with the goldfish. This "girl in the fishbowl" has been part of the nightclub since it opened in 1931 at 365 Market Street. In 1951, Bimbo's relocated to North Beach. Dolphina, as she is known, still lures patrons to the bar.

IT'S AN ILLUSION

A catacomb of tunnels in the bowels of the club leads to a small room containing a rotating platform on which the live “mermaid” reclines, naked. A periscope with angled mirrors projects her image up into the fishbowl where it appears that a tiny mermaid, about six inches long, is floating in an underwater grotto.

THE ORIGINAL BIMBO

Agostino Giuntoli, the original Bimbo, emigrated from Tuscany in 1922. (In Italian, Bimbo is short for bambino, or little boy.) The club is still run by Mr. Giuntoli’s family. Michael Cerchiai, 51, his grandson, remembers when Smokey Robinson played at his 7th-birthday party. He also recalls being mesmerized by Dolphina.



Ms. Knickerbocker applying lipstick.
Credit...Sarah Rice for The Bay Citizen

SWIMMING WITH FISHES

The first club, which opened during the Depression and Prohibition, had a one-way mirror on the front door to screen out police officers who were searching for illegal alcohol. The first women in the fishbowl were burlesque dancers; one was called Tempest Storm. A mermaid appeared every night until 1969. Now Dolphina performs only on special occasions.

A COLORFUL CAREER

For 25 years Donna Powers worked the fishbowl — from 1969 to New Year's Eve 1994. In 1991, she ran for City Council in Richmond and won. She held both jobs for a while, although some citizens tried to oust her for moonlighting naked. The movement backfired, and she served on the Council for eight years.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Chris Isaak, the pompadoured singer whose television series for Showtime was set in Bimbo's, appeared in the fishbowl — wearing boxers — on his 40th birthday. In the history of the fishbowl, there was only one other “merman.”

ON THE JOB

One of several current Dolphinas is Celeste Knickerbocker, 37. She earns \$100 a shift, working 10 minutes on, 20 off for four hours. Like her predecessors, she was told to keep her knees together and feign swimming, slowly.

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A version of this article appears in print on Jan. 1, 2012, Section A, Page NaN of the National edition with the headline: Girl in a Fishbowl: Bimbo's 365 Club, San Francisco. [Order Reprints](#) | [Today's Paper](#) | [Subscribe](#)

2014

Bimbo's 365 Club turns 85

GUARDIAN ARCHIVE 1966-2014

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[Home](#) [Volume 48 \(2013-14\)](#) [Volume 48 Number 33](#) [Bimbo's 365 club](#)

Bimbo's 365 club



When Agostino "Bimbo" Giuntoli first arrived in San Francisco from Italy in 1922, the 19-year-old found work as a janitor and then as a cook at the swanky Palace Hotel. He likely didn't think that, within 10 years, he'd be running one of the hottest Prohibition-era speakeasies in the city — where well-heeled guests came to drink, gamble, and watch a young Rita Hayworth dance in the chorus line. Even tougher to believe, most likely, would be the fact that his club is still in business, and run by his family, nearly 85 years later.

Bimbo's 365, named for its owner (whose nickname was born of a boss not knowing how to pronounce Italian) and its original address on Market Street, is one of a dwindling number of family-owned businesses in San Francisco — and at a time when other historic venues like Café du Nord are shuttering or getting a yuppified overhaul, Bimbo's seems (knock on wood) to be going strong.

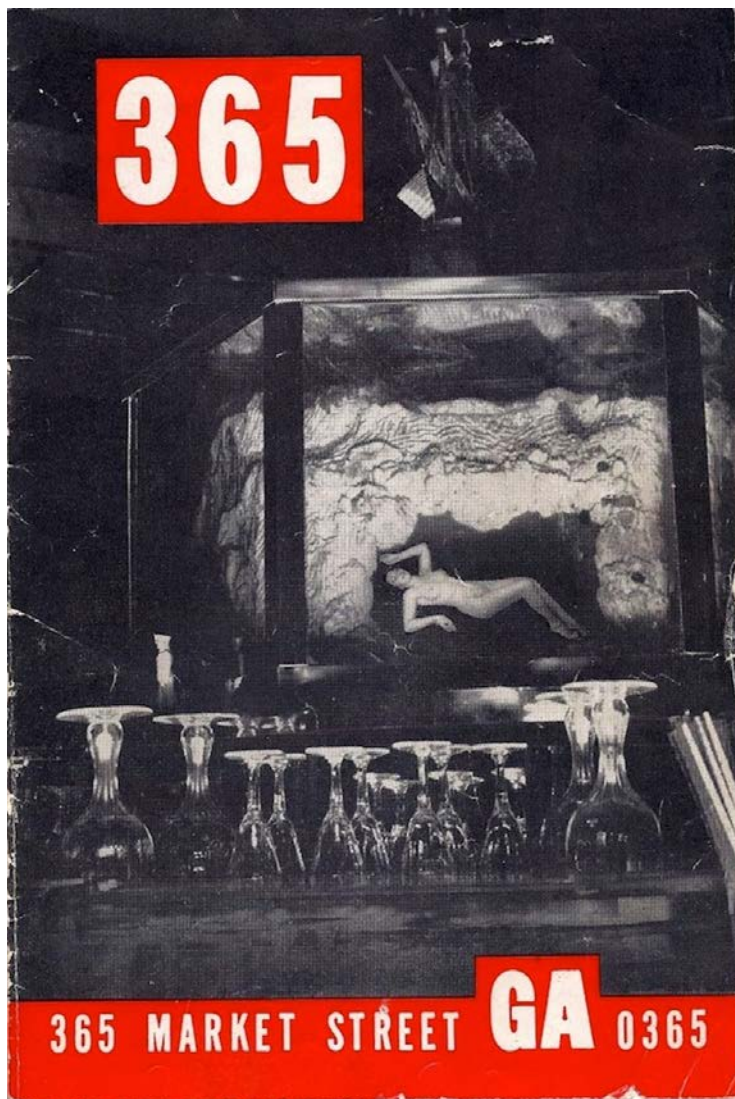
"We work really hard, and we're very fortunate to be where we are," says Michael Cerchiai, who reopened the club as a live venue in 1988 after nearly two decades of it being available only as a rental for private parties. Soon after, Bimbo's served as a hub for the burgeoning swing revival of the '90s and the growing acid jazz scene. Erykah Badu played there on her first national tour, as did Fiona Apple; the last time George Clinton and the P-Funk All-Stars came through, Stevie Wonder showed up unannounced and sang too.

"We're a tight-knit Italian family, so it's a lot of tough love. We get things off our chest, and I think sometimes you can't do that when it's not a family-run business," says Cerchiai, who recalls going to shows with his siblings when they were small children — back when the club was black-tie only. "We had a Felix [tuxedo rental] down the street, so we'd get dressed up and check out the show, and that was a way to see our grandfather and our dad."



The Legendary Brio of Bimbo's 365 Club

By [Alyssa Pereira](#)
Aug 04, 2014



*"The Woman in the Fishbowl",
Courtesy of Bimbo's 365 Club*

As the legend goes, guests visiting **Bimbo's 365** were subjected to a scandalous visage. They called her Dolfina, the woman in the fishbowl, and her appearance was part optical illusion made possible by strategically placed mirrors, and part burlesque dancer, in place to entice patrons towards the bar. She appeared as a mermaid relaxing underwater, and many of the frequent visitors and workers claimed to have dated her, "[the fishbowl woman](#)," but like Dolfina's illusion, who really knows the truth behind the fantasy?

These days, no real woman lounges in the fishbowl, but its iconic image is a simulacrum of the club's glamorous history. The image appears throughout the club in different places, from the bars to secret rooms tucked away as an everlasting leitmotif, re-emerging here and there like a recurring theme throughout Bimbo's three-generation dynasty.



Photos courtesy of Bimbo's 365 Club

Nearing 100 years old, Bimbo's is a pillar of San Francisco, and like Bimbo himself, who in the 50s created what manager Allyson Moulton aptly describes as "[the original Critical Mass](#)," the family has always been a big part of North Beach's rich history. In fact, Bimbo was so well-liked in San Francisco, that when Mayor Moscone (who was a good friend), caught wind of his epic 75th birthday celebration he ordered in a very special birthday card—from the President.

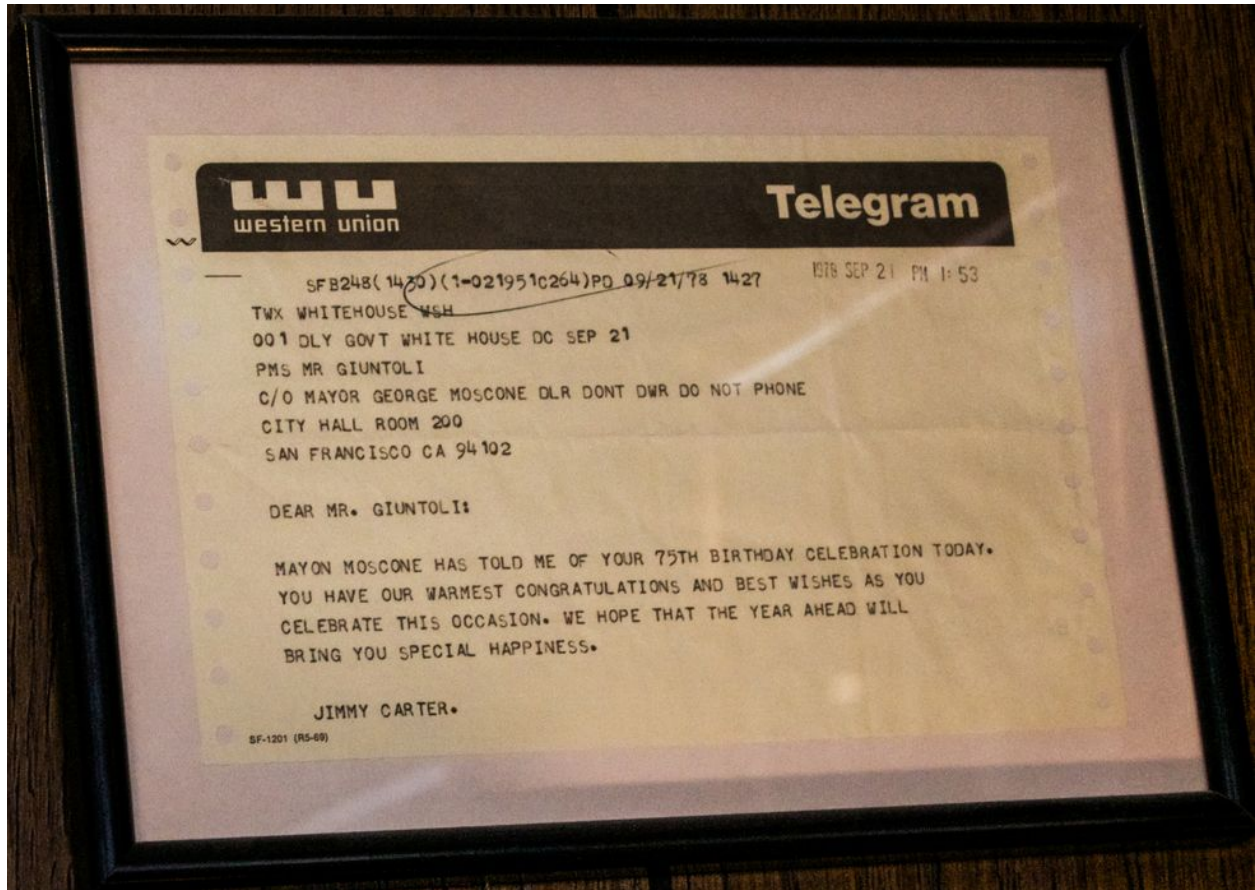


Photo by Alyssa Pereira

Today, Michael Cerchiai, Bimbo's grandson, owns and operates the club. It's something of a second home. He can even recall his eighth birthday at the venue, when he and his friends ate a Batman-themed cake while Smokey Robinson played onstage.

The club has been in operation for nearly 85 years under the ownership of Bimbo's family (first at 365 Market St., which is where the "365" derives from), and they've indeed seen their share of entertainment history in action. For example, there was that George Clinton show in 1992, when Cerchiai had just taken the reins to the club, and Stevie Wonder and his entourage rolled in. "He couldn't have been any nicer," he recalled. "But before I could bring him a glass of champagne, he was on stage singing with Clinton."



Photo by Alyssa Pereira

History gets made at Bimbo's. Even before the Condor rolled in their topless dancers, Bimbo's had topless performers, appearing festooned with extravagant plumage and embroidery onstage. Many years later, Fiona Apple played her first San Francisco show here as did Adele. Charlize Theron once kissed a woman in the audience for a 20k charity donation event, and Robin Williams riffed new material in a semi-secret, unbilled show just after 9-11, when, as Cerchiai puts it, "people really needed to laugh."



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mr. bimbo's

365

But he'll never forget when Al Pacino walked in. It was a party celebrating the 25th anniversary of *The Godfather* film, which, as the rumor goes, Francis Ford Coppola wrote just down the street at Caffé Trieste and Vesuvio. The whole thing is practically a [North Beach production](#). But that's an important sentiment in Bimbo's history as well—community.



Photo by Alyssa Pereira

Recent decades are rich with history too. Once, The Kooks almost burned down their dressing room at a show put on by Alice@97.3. It wasn't their fault—a malfunctioning laptop in their room exploded—but nevertheless, everyone, including the night's headliner Colbie Caillat, needed to be moved out of smoke's way. Cerchiai escorted the small group down to "Bimbo's Cantina", an intimate, semi-secret room attached to the venue's immaculate kitchen.



Photos by Alyssa Pereira

Not many have seen this room, but it's full of very old wine bottles, a mirror with a design of the legendary woman in the fishbowl (pictured above), and antiques, including a statuette of a wind-up, whistling sad clown standing next to a lamppost. When Jack White played Bimbo's (and he has several times, with both The Raconteurs and The White Stripes) his manager requested Cerchiai show White the clown, as he apparently has an affinity for antiques like these. He was right—White was smitten.



Photo by Alyssa Pereira

Probably the most memorable show in recent memory was that of The Flaming Lips in 2012 as part of Noise Pop's 20th anniversary celebration. The band revived their legendary [Boom Box Experiment](#), where essentially the band engineers a diabolical surround sound using multitudes of boom boxes to create, as MTV puts it, a sound that "vacillate[s] from sheets of metallic rain and electric hail falling on a tin roof to a dog barking in the distance as the song fade[s]^[L]_[SEP] out six minutes later." They ended the show with confetti—which the staff still finds today here and there.



Photo by Alyssa Pereira

Bimbo's has seen it all. From its nascent stages, where Bimbo self-admittedly used to bootleg liquor during the prohibition, to the last supper club dinner in 1969 and beyond, they've remained a sturdy presence in the city. They've seen nightly events spanning from a Rita Hayworth chorus line to the Cox-Arquette Wedding to Zola Jesus later this month, and they're not showing any signs of slowing down.

But most importantly, they hang on to their sincere hospitality, a fundamental component to their success. They love their guests, and they treat them well. "What I have in my heart—it's on my tongue," Bimbo told a news crew in a 1970s segment. "I love people."

For more on the Bay Area music scene, follow [@alyspereira](#) on Twitter.

Various

Family Celebrations at Bimbo's



**Top left: Gino and
Agostino (Mr. Bimbo)**

**Top right: one of Michael's
birthday parties at Bimbo's**

**Bottom: Family birthday
celebrations at Bimbo's**

Various

Family Photos in the kitchen at Bimbo's



Top left: Graziano as chef in the kitchen

Top right: Gino, Graziano, and Michael in the kitchen

Bottom: Family photo in the kitchen in 1999

Various

Family Photos at Bimbo's



**Top: Gino and Michael as bartenders at Bimbo's,
with Graziano at the bar**

Bottom: Michael and Graziano

2019
Current Photos – Exterior



2019
Current Photos – Interior



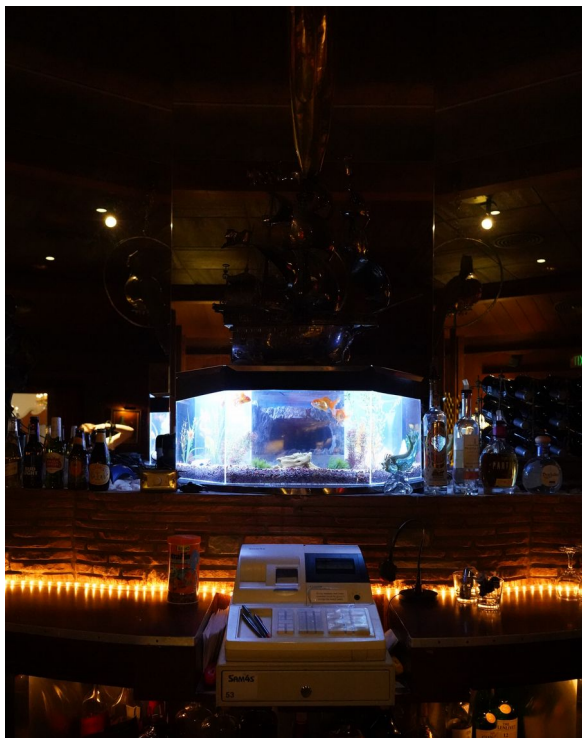
Top: Entrance lobby, with statue of Dolphina

Bottom left: Women's restroom

Bottom right: vintage Bimbo's memorabilia in display case

2019

Current Photos – Bar with Dolphina's fish bowl



Top: Bimbo's bar with fish bowl

Bottom: Fish bowl behind bar where Dolphina would be visible

2019

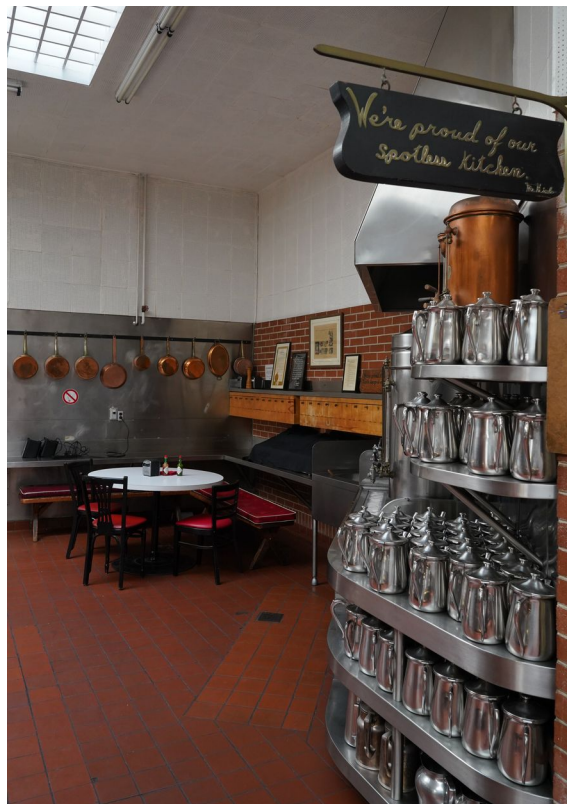
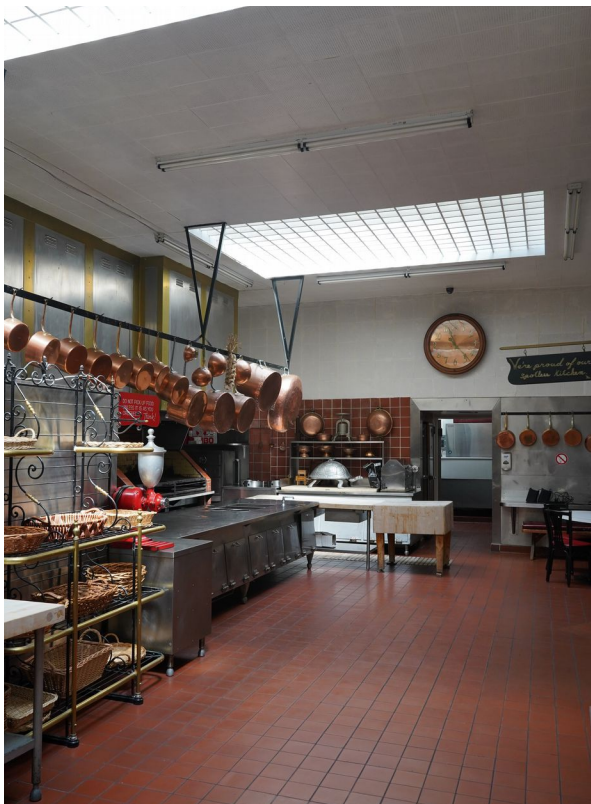
Current Photos – Stage, dining area, and back bar





2019

Current Photos – Kitchen



2019

Current Photos – Mr. Bimbo's Cantina

