



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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## Legacy Business Registry Case Report

HEARING DATE: NOVEMBER 15, 2017

*Filing Date:* October 19, 2017  
*Case No.:* 2017-013491LBR  
*Business Name:* Cliff's Variety  
*Business Address:* 479 Castro Street  
*Zoning:* NCD (Castro Street Neighborhood Commercial)/  
40-X Height and Bulk District  
*Block/Lot:* 3582/103  
*Applicant:* Terry Asten Bennett  
479 Castro Street  
San Francisco, CA 94114  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Jeff Sheehy, District 8  
*Staff Contact:* Desiree Smith - (415) 575-9093  
desiree.smith@sfgov.org  
*Reviewed By:* Tim Frye - (415) 575-6822  
tim.frye@sfgov.org

1650 Mission St.  
Suite 400  
San Francisco,  
CA 94103-2479

Reception:  
**415.558.6378**

Fax:  
**415.558.6409**

Planning  
Information:  
**415.558.6377**

### BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Cliff's Variety is a neighborhood hardware and variety store serving the Castro District since 1936. Founded by Hilario DeBaca, a former merchant and school teacher from New Mexico, the business was run solely by Hilario with help from his granddaughter, Lorraine, after school. The store has offered hardware, home goods, fabrics, candy, and other everyday items for neighborhood residents for over 80 years. Its offerings range from home improvement, to textiles and toys, to art and cooking supplies. It is the Castro's longest-running retailer and has long been known as the place to go for repairs and knowledgeable advice on decorating, costuming, cooking, sewing, and entertaining.

While the store was named after Hilario's youngest son, Clifford, it was Hilario and Lena's oldest son, Ernie, who joined the business and eventually assumed ownership. Ernie had previously operated his own repair shop in the Tenderloin during the 1930s. After suffering from a bad accident that forced him to close his shop in the Tenderloin, he began to work for his father, bringing his superior repair skills to the variety store where he carried out electronic, lock, clock, electrical, plumbing, and mechanical repairs. Ernie also designed several space-saving machines that came to characterize the store. These included a ribbon machine, two button machines, and rolling ladders. Ernie started the store's tradition of creating elaborate window displays, especially during holidays like Halloween, and was responsible for launching the first Halloween street party on Castro Street. The event was family-focused and centered on a children's costume contest from the 1950s through the 1970s until adult Halloween parties took over.

Cliff's Variety greatly expanded from the 1970s to the 1990s, changing locations several times and modifying inventory to reflect changing tastes and needs of the neighborhood over the years. Now

operated by fourth generation family member, Terry Asten Bennett, the business serves over 700 people daily and helps attracts foot traffic to surrounding businesses. The business gives to neighborhood schools such as the Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy and to nonprofits like AIDS LifeCycle.

Located on the east side of Castro Street between 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> streets, Cliff's Variety is within the NCD (Castro Street Neighborhood Commercial Zoning District and a 40-X Height and Bulk District.

## STAFF ANALYSIS

### *Review Criteria*

1. *When was business founded?*

The business was founded in 1936.

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

Yes, Cliff's Variety qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- i. Cliff's Variety has operated for 81 years.
- ii. Cliff's Variety has contributed to the history and identity of the Castro District by serving as a neighborhood hardware and variety shop, and reliable source of repair assistance and homeware advice, since 1936.
- iii. Cliff's Variety is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the neighborhood hardware store and variety shop, including its eclectic retail that respond to the needs of its customer base, its practice of offering knowledgeable advice, its use of space-saving inventions, and its long tradition of creating interesting and expressive window displays.

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

The business is associated with the tradition of operating small neighborhood-serving variety and hardware stores with knowledgeable and helpful staff.

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

The property has not been evaluated for historical or architectural significance on its own, however it is located within the California Register-eligible Castro Street Historic District and formerly housed the original Castro Theater.

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

No, however it is located within the California Register-eligible Castro Street Historic District.

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

Yes. It is mentioned in the LGBTQ Historic Context Statement which references how "run-down Victorians were restored by new residents who shopped for paint, hammers, and other tools and supplies at Cliff's Variety Store" in the 1970s (p. 170).

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



The business has been cited in a number of publications, including but not limited to: Armistead Maupin's *Tales of The City*; San Francisco Chronicle, 2/13/2015, "Hardware stores hammer out creative Valentine's Day displays," by Steve Rubenstein; Hoodline, 5/28/2016, "80 Years and counting: Castro's Cliff's Variety Recognized as Best Small Business in California," by Shane Downing; Hardware Retailing, 9/8/2017, "Diverse San Francisco Retailers Collaborate on Training," by Renee Changnon; Hoodline, 3/28/2017, "Neighborhood Shops See Poster Board, Art Supply Sales Soar In the Time of Trump," by Shane Downing; and SF Gate, 6/11/2011, "Cliff's Variety Store – 75 and going strong," by Sarah Adler.

Cliff's Variety has also been the recipient of numerous awards and accolades, including:

- 2009 Best Small Business Owner, 25 or More Employees, San Francisco Small Business Network
- 2014 Small Business of the Year, Council of District Merchants
- 2016 Best Small Business in California award, California State Legislature
- 2015 Certificate of Honor, San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee
- 2015 Certificate of Honor, City and County of San Francisco Office of the Assessor-Recorder
- Cliff's Variety Day, June 2, 2016, City and County of San Francisco Proclamation

### ***Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business***

#### **Location(s) associated with the business:**

- 479 Castro Street

#### **Recommended by Applicant**

- Eclectic variety of goods
- Knowledgeable customer service
- Tradition of creating specially themed and creative window displays
- High arched ceiling
- Rolling ladders
- Ribbon machine

#### **Additional Recommended by Staff**

No additional recommendations

*Filing Date:* October 19, 2017  
*Case No.:* 2017-013496LBR  
*Business Name:* Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano  
*Business Address:* 1042 Kearny Street  
*Zoning:* NCD (Broadway Neighborhood Commercial)/  
65-A-1 Height and Bulk District  
*Block/Lot:* 0163/021  
*Applicant:* Carmen Crotti, Co-Owner  
1042 Kearny Street  
San Francisco, CA 94133  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Aaron Peskin, District 3  
*Staff Contact:* Desiree Smith - (415) 575-9093  
desiree.smith@sfgov.org  
*Reviewed By:* Tim Frye – (415) 575-6822  
tim.frye@sfgov.org

## BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano is a Neapolitan style family restaurant in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood that was founded in 1971 but whose roots date to 1935. In 1935, the Cantalupo family from Naples, Italy, opened a Neapolitan-style restaurant called Lupo's. It was the first Neapolitan style restaurant in the city famous for its wood-fired brick oven, and prides itself in introducing pizza to the West Coast.

In 1971, the business, except for the name, was given to its longtime chef, Tommy "Tommaso" Chin. Although it operated under a new name, Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano, the business remained virtually unchanged. Then in 1973, the business was sold to the Crotti family. Aside from the addition of a few family recipes of their own, Tommaso's recipes, traditions, and décor remained the same as it had under the two previous owners. The business remains family owned and operated to this day, with family members working as cooks, food servers, and bookkeepers.

For 82 years, North Beach residents and visitors have frequented the Italian restaurant at 1042 Kearny Street known for its fresh ingredients, true Neapolitan recipes, assortment of wine, and characteristic oak wood fired brick oven. The oven, reminiscent of those used in Naples, inspired notable Bay Area chefs such as Alice Waters to replicate it and use it in their own restaurants.

The Crotti family is well-known in the North Beach area, having worked for other Italian restaurants in the neighborhood, participating in the Top of Broadway Community Benefits District, and donating pizza to various North Beach nonprofit organizations.

Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano is located on the east side of Kearny Street at Broadway in North Beach. Its building is a contributor to the California Register-eligible Jackson Square Historic District Extension. The subject business is located within the NCD (Broadway Neighborhood Commercial) Zoning District and a 65-A-1 Height and Bulk District.

## STAFF ANALYSIS

### *Review Criteria*

1. *When was business founded?*

Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano was founded in 1971; however its roots date back to 1935 as it kept the same location, business model, interior and exterior décor, and recipes as its predecessor, Lupo's.

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

Yes, Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- i. It has operated for 46 years as Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano, however, pizza and Italian food has been served out of the 1042 Kearny Street location for 82 years. Other than the name, the business remains largely the same as it did when it operated under the name of Lupo's, the city's first pizza restaurant founded in 1935.
- ii. Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano has contributed to the identity of the North Beach neighborhood and to San Francisco's culinary heritage by introducing pizza in general, and wood-fired pizzas specifically, to the city and to the West Coast. The restaurant represents the intangible Italian heritage of North Beach and is as a culinary destination within the city.
- iii. Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the Neapolitan-style Italian restaurant that has served the North Beach neighborhood since 1935.

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

The business is associated with the culinary traditions of Northern Italy, including wood-fired oven pizzas, baked Italian specialties, and the family recipes of the Cantalupos and Crottis handed down through generations. It was the first to bring Neapolitan style cuisine, including pizza, to San Francisco.

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

The property is located within the California Register-eligible Jackson Square Historic District Extension.

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

No, however it is located within the California Register-eligible Jackson Square Historic District Extension.

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

No.

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

Yes, the business has been cited in numerous publications, including but not limited to:

RestaurantNews.com, 10/14/15, "Tommaso's Restaurant Celebrates 80 Years in San Francisco"; SF Gate, 6/18/14, "The Classics: Tommaso's serving wood-fired pizza since 1935," by Michael Bauer; Hoodline, "Tommaso's Celebrates 80 Years in North Beach," by Holly Erickson; and SF Gate, 6/2/14, "San Francisco Architectural Heritage inducts 25 more bars and restaurants into Legacy Project," by Paolo Lucchesi.

Tommaso's is listed on San Francisco Heritage's list of Legacy Bars & Restaurants.

***Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business***

**Location(s) associated with the business:**

- 1042 Kearny Street

**Recommended by Applicant**

- Italian cuisine, including traditional dishes from northern Italy and wood-fired pizzas
- Oak-burning wood brick oven
- Large communal table at the center of the restaurant surrounded by booths
- Interior décor featuring oil paintings, photos, articles, and posters dedicated to the restaurant
- Dark green paint and wood signs featuring the Tommaso's logo on the exterior of the restaurant

**Additional Recommended by Staff**

- No additional recommendations

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The Applicant has been nominated as a "Legacy Business" by a member of the Board of Supervisors or the Mayor.

## **OTHER ACTIONS REQUIRED**

Per Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the subject nomination requires review and approval by the Small Business Commission at a public hearing in order to be added to the Legacy Business Registry.

## **PUBLIC/NEIGHBORHOOD INPUT**

The Department has received no public input on the project at the date of this report.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW STATUS**

Nomination to the Legacy Business Registry does not constitute a "project" requiring environmental review per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The nomination act would not result in any physical alteration to the subject property and could not have an effect on the environment.

## **PLANNING DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission find that Cliff's Variety and Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano qualify for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) and recommends safeguarding of the above listed physical features and traditions as amended by Staff.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Draft Resolution  
Legacy Business Application

DS: XXXX



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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## Historic Preservation Commission Resolution

HEARING DATE NOVEMBER 15, 2017

1650 Mission St.  
Suite 400  
San Francisco,  
CA 94103-2479

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*Staff Contact:* Desiree Smith - (415) 575-9093  
desiree.smith@sfgov.org  
*Reviewed By:* Tim Frye – (415) 575-6822  
tim.frye@sfgov.org

**ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR CLIFF'S VARIETY, CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 479 CASTRO STREET (BLOCK/LOT 3582/103).**

**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 Castro neighborhood's history and identity; and

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

**WHEREAS**, at a duly noticed public hearing held on November 15, 2017, 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 Cliff's Variety 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 Cliff's Variety.

*Location:*

- 479 Castro Street

*Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business*

- Eclectic variety of goods
- Knowledgeable customer service
- Tradition of creating specially themed and creative window displays
- High arched ceiling
- Rolling ladders
- Ribbon machine

**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 2017-013491LBR to the Office of Small Business.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Historic Preservation Commission on November 15, 2017.

Jonas P. Ionin  
Commission Secretary

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ADOPTED:



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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## Historic Preservation Commission Resolution

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**ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR TOMMASO'S RISTORANTE ITALIANO, CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 1042 KEARNY STREET (BLOCK/LOT 0163/021).**

**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 North Beach neighborhood's history and identity; and

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



**WHEREAS**, at a duly noticed public hearing held on November 15, 2017, 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 Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano 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 Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano.

***Location:***

- 1042 Kearny Street

***Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business***

- Italian cuisine, including traditional dishes from northern Italy and wood-fired pizzas
- Oak-burning wood brick oven
- Large communal table at the center of the restaurant surrounded by booths
- Interior décor featuring oil paintings, photos, articles, and posters dedicated to the restaurant
- Dark green paint and wood signs featuring the Tommaso's logo on the exterior of the restaurant

**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 2017-013496LBR to the Office of Small Business.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Historic Preservation Commission on November 15, 2017.

Jonas P. Ionin  
Commission Secretary

AYES:  
NOES:  
ABSENT:  
ADOPTED:



SAN FRANCISCO

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO  
EDWIN M. LEE, MAYOR

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS  
REGINA DICK-ENDRIZZI, DIRECTOR

## Legacy Business Registry

# Application Review Sheet

*Application No.:* LBR-2017-18-019  
*Business Name:* Cliff's Variety  
*Business Address:* 479 Castro Street  
*District:* District 8  
*Applicant:* Terry Asten Bennett, General Manager/President  
*Nomination Date:* October 2, 2017  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Jeff Sheehy

**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

545 Castro Street from 1936 to 1942 (6 years)  
515 Castro Street from 1942 to 1960 (18 years)  
495 Castro Street from 1960 to 1971 (11 years)  
479 Castro Street from 1971 to Present (46 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:** NA

**DELIVERY DATE TO HPC:** October 19, 2017

Richard Kurylo  
Manager, Legacy Business Program



Member, Board of Supervisors  
District 8



City and County of San Francisco

**JEFF SHEEHY**

October 2, 2017

Dear Director Regina Dick Endrizzi:

I'm writing to nominate Cliff's Variety Hardware Store for the Legacy Business Registry. A San Francisco landmark in the Castro District, Cliff's Variety's first store has been open since the mid 1930's. Opened by a former merchant and school teacher, Hilario DeBaca, he has provided multiple goods such as home hardware, magazines, sewing notions, and candy.

Cliff's Variety Hardware Store has been a place for the neighborhood to come together, and has provided a sense of community for over 80 years. I strongly believe the business would benefit greatly from being a part of San Francisco's Legacy Business Registry, and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Sheehy".

Jeff Sheehy  
Member, San Francisco Board of Supervisors

## Section One:

### Business / Applicant Information. 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:		
DeBaca Corp. dba Cliff's Variety		
BUSINESS OWNER(S) (identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business)		
Ernest Asten		
CURRENT BUSINESS ADDRESS:	TELEPHONE:	
479 Castro Street San Francisco, CA 94114	(415) 431-5365	
	EMAIL:	
	terryasten@cs.com	
WEBSITE:	FACEBOOK PAGE:	YELP PAGE
Cliffsvariety.com	Cliff's Variety	Cliff's Variety

APPLICANT'S NAME	
Terry Asten Bennett	<input type="checkbox"/> Same as Business
APPLICANT'S TITLE	
General Manager / President	
APPLICANT'S ADDRESS:	TELEPHONE:
479 Castro Street SF CA 94114	(415) 431-5365
	EMAIL:
	terryasten@cs.com

SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS ACCOUNT NUMBER:	SECRETARY OF STATE ENTITY NUMBER (if applicable):
0080170	C0685322

OFFICIAL USE: Completed by OSB Staff	
NAME OF NOMINATOR:	DATE OF NOMINATION:



## 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
545 Castro Street SF CA 94114	94114	1936
IS THIS LOCATION THE FOUNDING LOCATION OF THE BUSINESS?	DATES OF OPERATION AT THIS LOCATON	
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	1936-1942	

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
515 Castro Street SF CA 94114	94114	Start: 1942 End: May 1960

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
495 Castro Street SF CA 94114	94114	Start: May 1960 End: Aug 1971

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
479 Castro Street SF CA 94114	94114	Start: Aug 1971 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:

## 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 and a business deemed not current in 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 the Business Assistance Grant.

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.

Terry Asten Bennett 08/01/17

Name (Print):

Date:

Signature: 

## **CLIFF'S VARIETY**

### **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.**

Cliff's Variety Store and Hardware is a hardware, home goods, variety and fabric store located in the Castro neighborhood of San Francisco, California since 1936. It has been in business for over 80 years, is considered a neighborhood institution, and predates the neighborhood becoming the first widely recognized gay mecca starting in the 1960s. It is one of the oldest family-run stores in the city.

Cliff's Variety has operated in San Francisco for more than 80 years and should be considered for listing on the Legacy Business Registry. The history of the business is as follows:

Cliff's Variety was founded by Hilario DeBaca, a former merchant and schoolteacher from New Mexico, who came out of retirement to open the business at 545 Castro Street. The shop was mostly a one-man operation with Hilario's granddaughter, Lorraine, helping out after school. Hilario named the store after his youngest son, Clifford. The store sold a variety of goods including magazines, cigars, sewing notions, greeting cards, toys, and candy.

Besides his son Cliff, Hilario and his wife Lena had four other children: Irene, Ernie, Eloy, and Estelle. It would be his oldest son Ernie, not the store's namesake Cliff, who would join in the business with his father.

Ernie was born in 1903. From his earliest days Ernie was an entrepreneur. At the age of 14 he operated a horse-drawn popcorn wagon at baseball games in Arizona. At the age of 15 he entered an apprenticeship on the Santa Fe Railroad to be a boilermaker. In the early 1920s he worked on steam locomotives at the Santa Fe yard in Richmond, California. Ernie DeBaca went on to start a taxi service in San Rafael with four limousines. In 1921 he married Alice and later they moved to San Francisco, where he bell-hopped at the Wiltshire Hotel (now the Drake near Union Square). At this time he also formed a dance band called the Spanish Don's with his brother Cliff on tenor saxophone. Ernie played banjo in the five-piece band.

In the 1930s Ernie DeBaca operated Ernie's Repair Shop in San Francisco's Tenderloin. His business offered radio sales and service, lock repair, electrical and plumbing repair, welding, sheet metal work, and mechanical repairs. In 1933, in the midst of the Depression, Ernie and Alice bought a used Studebaker President, which they converted into a motor home. They closed the repair shop and with their daughter Lorraine they headed to the Chicago World's Fair. Ernie loaded the caravan with radio parts and in every town they stopped in along the way he would ask if anyone needed a radio fixed. In some of the small towns people brought him radios that hadn't worked in years.



After seeing the fair and a good slice of the country, Ernie and his family landed in Los Angeles and, without missing a beat, he started up a small candy factory. In 1936 they returned to San Francisco to open another repair shop. This was about the same time Ernie's father was opening Cliff's at 545 Castro Street.

In 1942 Hilario DeBaca moved his store a few doors closer to 18th Street to 515 Castro Street. This shop, though still quite small, had double the space of the first Cliff's. In 1946, Ernie DeBaca had a motorcycle accident that crushed his ankle. He was laid up for several months recuperating. He had to close his repair shop and he set up a workbench in the back of Cliff's Variety where he could repair small appliances.

Cliff's at 515 Castro Street became the birthplace of many of Ernie DeBaca's innovations in merchandising. To take advantage of the only space left in the store, the ceiling, he created a candy machine that consisted of metal trays full of candy bars. The trays were suspended between two loops of a bicycle chain, which ran in tracks. The customer could throw a switch to start a motor to move the chain. The trays at counter level would rise up to the ceiling as the higher trays descended to the customer's reach. This allowed a large selection of candy to be displayed in a small counter space. Later he built a similar device for spools of sewing ribbon (this machine is still operational and can be seen in the Sewing Department of our Annex). More machines followed: two machines for sewing buttons which took cards of buttons for a ride up to the ceiling and the length of the store and back, and similar machines for key blanks, greeting cards, and fabric dyes.



On July 19, 1952, Hilario DeBaca passed away and Ernie DeBaca took over ownership of Cliff's Variety.

In May of 1960, Cliff's Variety Store moved to 495 Castro Street. Three of the space-saving machines were set up in the new space: the ribbon machine and two button machines. Ernie DeBaca was a native genius and was able to fix almost anything. People brought in nearly everything to be repaired: televisions, radios, toasters, lamps, locks, clocks, windows, and the kitchen sink.

Alice DeBaca, Ernie's wife, worked the store and took care of their grandson, Ernie Asten. In 1963, she suffered a stroke. It took more than a year for her to recover to the point where she could visit the store in her wheelchair and later with her walker. Ernie and Alice DeBaca's daughter, Lorraine, returned to help run the store in Alice's absence. However, Lorraine's husband was in the Navy stationed on the East Coast, and she needed to be with him. Ernie Asten was by this time old enough to help out at the store after school. He would mind the store while his grandfather went home for dinner, but more help was necessary and a few other employees were hired. One of these was Lena Sozzi, who worked for Cliff's from 1964 until her death in May of 1989. Martha Sullivan, Ernie Asten's girlfriend, started helping out at Halloween and Christmas. In the summer of 1968, Martha started full time. Ernie and Martha married in 1969 and they have been at Cliff's ever since.

In early 1971, the landlord of 495 Castro Street told Ernie DeBaca that his rent would triple when his lease expired later that year. Fortune smiled on Ernie and Cliff's when the Bon Omi store (a five and dime) went out of business. The day it closed, Ernie made an offer on the building and purchased 479 Castro Street in August of 1971.



In September of 1971, Alice DeBaca passed away. She had been working along with Ernie, her husband of 49 years, to get the store moved, but she never got to see it open in the new location. After Alice passed away Cliff's was incorporated, and Ernie Asten took over the ownership.

In October of 1971, Cliff's opened at 479 Castro Street. The building was erected in 1910 as the Castro Theater. It was remodeled into a retail store in the mid 1920s after the larger Castro Theater was built. This store was much larger than the previous one, and it seemed that it would be impossible to fill the place up. The merchandise was spread out to make the store look full, however, it was not long before the shelves started going higher up the walls. Ernie Asten, who had grown up at his grandfather's side, had learned many skills. It was his idea to add the rolling ladders. As new counters were needed, he found it easier to build them himself than to find just what was needed to fill a particular spot. Product lines were added and expanded to meet the needs of people restoring their Victorians, and lines were also added to accommodate people putting their drag costumes together. So, you could get a plaster ceiling medallion, a feather boa, a toilet fill valve, a rhinestone tiara, and toys for the nieces and nephews all in one place!

The 70s not only witnessed the expansion of the business, it also saw the birth of Ernie and Martha's two daughters. After growing up in the city, the youngest daughter Marian decided to forgo city life as an adult and moved north for a life in the country. The older daughter, Terry, spent her high school years working at the store in the family tradition before going away to college.

The 80s were a time of rapid growth for Cliff's. The property value in the neighborhood experienced a steady climb as gay people the world over flocked to live in the new gay mecca. As the energy in the neighborhood increased so did the business at Cliff's. It became a neighborhood hub where old friends would meet and new friends were made.

As the business flourished, so did the need for more space. Even though a decade earlier an entire basement had been excavated beneath the floor of the store, Cliff's was still quickly running out of room. The counters grew taller and more creative ways were devised to display and store the ever-growing number of items needed to satisfy the growing demands of the neighborhood.

It was in the late 80s that relief would come to an overloaded Cliff's Variety. The store adjacent to Cliff's, a Hallmark Card shop (formerly Work Wonders, a furniture store, and before that Square Deal Paints), became available to lease. Ernie and Martha quickly jumped at the opportunity and it was decided the space would become the new home of Cliff's fabric and linens as well as bedding and bath accessories now referred to as "The Annex."

The store would go through many changes during the early 90s, and it would be the dot com boom of the late 90s that would shape the product selection that is Cliff's Annex today. The rapid influx of money into the city and a mantra of "money is no object" allowed Cliff's to break away from its 5 & 10 reputation and move into the world of upscale marketing.

It was in the height of this boom that another opportunity for expansion would arise. After many years trying to convince the building owner at 471 Castro (The Annex) to sell, she finally conceded. Cliff's quickly bought the property. This created many possibilities for the future growth of a booming business. Plans were soon devised to remodel the existing structure creating more floor space as well

as desperately needed storage. In July of 2004, the parcels at 479 and 471 Castro Street were merged into one parcel. Cliff's today is a larger structure comprised of the two stores combined creating a larger overall retail space while maintaining the better-best offering our customers have grown to expect.

The late 90s also saw the return from college of Terry, Martha and Ernie's eldest daughter. It was during this period of growth that Terry chose to carry on the family tradition and began her rite of passage to becoming the latest generation to take over operations of Cliff's Variety. In 2003, Terry herself had a daughter who is growing up in her grandfather's footsteps and may one day be the next generation to carry on the history of one of the oldest family owned stores in San Francisco.

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

Cliff's Variety has been in continuous operation since its founding in 1936 - always in San Francisco and always on the same two blocks of Castro Street.

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

Yes, Cliff's Variety is a family-owned business. Cliff's was founded in 1936 by Hilario DeBaca. Hilario's son Ernie DeBaca took over the business in July of 1952 when his father died. Ernie Asten, Ernie DeBaca's grandson, took over ownership of the business when it was incorporated in 1971. This is also when Cliff's moved into its current location at 479 Castro Street.

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

Not applicable.

**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.**

Not applicable. Cliff's Variety has been owned by the same family since it was founded in 1936.

**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.**

Cliff's Variety's current location, 479 Castro Street, is the site of the original Castro Theatre, which was built in 1910. This reflects the historical significance of the building to Eureka Valley. The building was erected in 1910 as the Castro Theater but was remodeled into a retail store in the mid 1920s after the larger Castro Theater was built. The original architecture of the theater can still be seen in the high arched ceilings. The building is classified as a Category A building (historical resources present) with regard to the California Environmental Quality Act.

## **CRITERION 2**

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

Cliff's Variety has been at the center of the identity and history of San Francisco especially in the gay rights movement. Cliff's Variety has served the Eureka Valley community since it was founded. Eureka Valley was a sleepy neighborhood in the early 1960s, then the Haight-Ashbury "happened" and San Francisco had an incredible influx of people. When the apartments in the Haight filled up, some of the overflow came to Eureka Valley. The weather was nice and the flats were spacious and cheap, so groups of "hippies" moved in. After the Summer of Love, many of the hippies drifted away to communes in Oregon and other destinations. By the mid-60s, there were already a few gay owned businesses on Castro Street: a gift shop, a record store, and an antique shop; and there was a bar, The Missouri Mule, on Market Street. Gay men and lesbians were becoming more visible on Castro Street. Gays started buying the old houses recognizing the potential of these neglected Victorians. As the property values rose, families were selling and moving to the suburbs. As gays moved in, gay bars replaced the straight bars and the sleepy neighborhood took on a new and different life. Other businesses in the area were changing. Property values were rising and it was inevitable that commercial rents would increase.

There were rapid changes in the neighborhood during the 70s. As the gay population exploded, the street was constantly bustling with people. In 1971, Cliff's had three employees who were not family. As the business grew, the number of workers increased to 42. Cliff's was the first straight-owned business on the block to hire openly gay employees. As the neighborhood changed, so did the skills required of sales clerks. In addition to a knowledge of hardware, electrical and plumbing, people were needed who could advise with decorating, costuming, cooking, sewing and entertaining.

Further, Ernie DeBaca had a long tradition of elaborate window displays, especially at Halloween and Christmas. As new people were hired, they were encouraged to share their talents and creativity. Over the years, Jay Jebens, Paul Ellis, Larry Bair, A.J. Powell, Erik Morales, Franc Robles and many others have contributed to the innovative window displays that the customers have come to love.

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

On Halloween in 1946, Ernie DeBaca produced the first Halloween street party on Castro Street. It started very small as a children's costume contest. The first year, a stool served as a stage. Each child would stand on the stool and the crowd would applaud. The child with the loudest applause won. The tradition grew over the years with a flatbed truck serving as a stage with lights and a P.A. system. In addition to the costume contest, there were musicians, clowns, jugglers and other types of entertainment; and there was an ice cream eating contest and a parade. This tradition of a children's Halloween party continued through the 50s, 60s, and 70s. It came to a sad end in 1979 when instead of hosting hundreds of local children, Castro Street had crowds of tens of thousands of rowdy adults fighting and breaking windows. Ernie DeBaca realized that his Halloween tradition had ended.

As the neighborhood changed so did the flavor of Halloween, transitioning Halloween from a holiday only for children into the adult event it remains today. Although Cliff's no longer hosts the children's event, they still sponsor the Children's Halloween Costume Contest now hosted by The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

In 2009, Cliff's was honored by the Small Business Network as Best Small Business Owner with more than 25 employees of the year. In 2014, Cliff's was honored by the Council of District Merchants as Small Business of the year. In 2016, Cliff's was honored as one of the Best Small Businesses in California by the State Legislature. Cliff's has countless accolades from Mark Leno, David Chui, Mayor Ed Lee, Scott Weiner and a multitude of other politicians.

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

Cliff's Variety is referenced in Armistead Maupin's Tales of The City. Cliff's is frequently featured on the news around Halloween, Christmas, Gay Pride or whenever anything is going on in the Castro. There are several articles about Cliff's in the BAR, SF Bay Times and Hoodline. Cliff's has been featured in 7x7 Magazine, Where Magazine and Hardware Retailing Magazine.

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

While none of the Cliff's family is historically significant, several historic figures have frequented Cliff's including: Harvey Milk, Cleve Jones, Marga Gomez, Armistead Maupin, Donna Sachet, Benjamin Bratt, Tracy Chapman, Randy Schiller, Robin Williams, Sylvester and Divine.

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

Cliff's believes in giving back to the community that supports us. Through endless donations of products and gift cards, the business supports the neighborhood schools and city-wide nonprofits.

Cliff's Variety hosts an annual fundraiser to support Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy, the public elementary school located 3 blocks away. Over the years, Cliff's has raised more than \$50,000 for the school. Cliff's also sponsors the annual "Inscribe" event held annually on World AIDS Day by providing the supplies needed. Cliff's also donates a portion of their profits that day to support the AIDS LifeCycle.

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

The Castro is known for being the Gay Mecca of San Francisco and tourist destination. However, the reality of the Castro is that it is a mix of gay, straight, singles, families, home-owners, renters, natives and transplants. The physical makeup of the Castro is a residential neighborhood, with a thriving business corridor and transportation hub.

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

Cliff's Variety's current location, 479 Castro Street, is the site of the original Castro Theatre, which was built in 1910. This reflects the historical significance of the building to Eureka Valley. The building was

erected in 1910 as the Castro Theater but was remodeled into a retail store in the mid 1920s after the larger Castro Theater was built. The original architecture of the theater can still be seen in the high arched ceilings. The building is classified as a Category A building (historical resources present) with regard to the California Environmental Quality Act.

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

If sold, relocated or shut down, the community would lose one of the oldest family stores in San Francisco with Ernie's roots going back to the 1930s. The absence of Cliff's Variety would result in the loss of a robust store that has served San Francisco and helped the gay community. Cliff's is the anchor retail business in the Castro driving foot steps to all of its neighbor businesses. Without Cliff's in the Castro to serve its over 700 customers per day, the Castro would be less of a neighborhood and more of an entertainment district.

### **CRITERION 3**

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

Cliff's mission has always been to serve the needs of the community. Cliff's has accomplished that with its every changing variety of goods and knowledgeable customer service. As the make-up of the neighborhood changes, the business adjusts to continue serving its needs.

**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 businesses historical character? (e.g., business model, goods and services, craft, culinary, or art forms)**

The characteristics that have defined Cliff's through the years are its eclectic variety of goods and its knowledgeable customer service. While the product mix changes frequently to meet the needs of the community, these two things remain consistent.

**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.).**

Cliff's most defining characteristics are the high arched ceiling, rolling ladders, ribbon machine and amazing window displays. These are features that the Cliff's family holds dear and has maintained through the decades.

**d. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30years; 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.**

Not applicable.

# BUSINESS REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE

RENEW BY DATE  
05-31-2017

EXPIRATION DATE  
06-30-2017

BUSINESS ACCOUNT NUMBER

0334024

LOCATION ID

0334024-01-001

TRADE NAME (DBA)

ASTEN FAMILY REVOCABLE TRUST

BUSINESS LOCATION

471 CASTRO ST

# BUSINESS REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE

RENEW BY DATE  
05-31-2017

EXPIRATION DATE  
06-30-2017

BUSINESS ACCOUNT NUMBER

0080170

LOCATION ID

0080170-01-001

TRADE NAME (DBA)

CLIFFS VARIETY STORE

BUSINESS LOCATION

479 CASTRO ST

DISPLAY CONSPICUOUSLY AT PLACE OF BUSINESS FOR WHICH ISSUED

CALIFORNIA STATE BOARD OF EQUALIZATION

## SELLER'S PERMIT



ACCOUNT NUMBER

1/1/1974 SR BH 19633300

CLIFF'S VARIETY STORE  
DE BACA CORPORATION  
479 CASTRO ST.

SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94114

THIS PERMIT DOES NOT  
AUTHORIZE THE HOLDER  
TO ENGAGE IN ANY  
BUSINESS CONTRARY TO  
LAWS REGULATING THAT  
BUSINESS OR TO  
POSSESS OR OPERATE  
ANY ILLEGAL DEVICE.

IS HEREBY AUTHORIZED PURSUANT TO SALES AND USE TAX LAW  
TO ENGAGE IN THE BUSINESS OF SELLING TANGIBLE PERSONAL  
PROPERTY AT THE ABOVE LOCATION

Not valid at any other address

THIS PERMIT IS VALID UNTIL REVOKED OR CANCELED BUT IS NOT TRANSFERABLE. IF YOU SELL YOUR BUSINESS,  
OR DROP OUT OF A PARTNERSHIP, NOTIFY US OR YOU COULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR SALES AND USE TAXES  
DUE BY THE NEW OPERATOR OF THE BUSINESS.

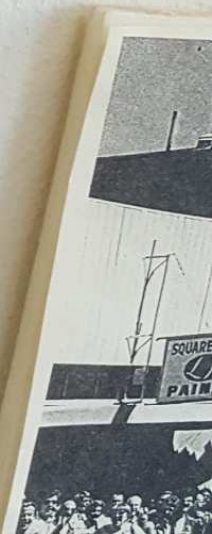
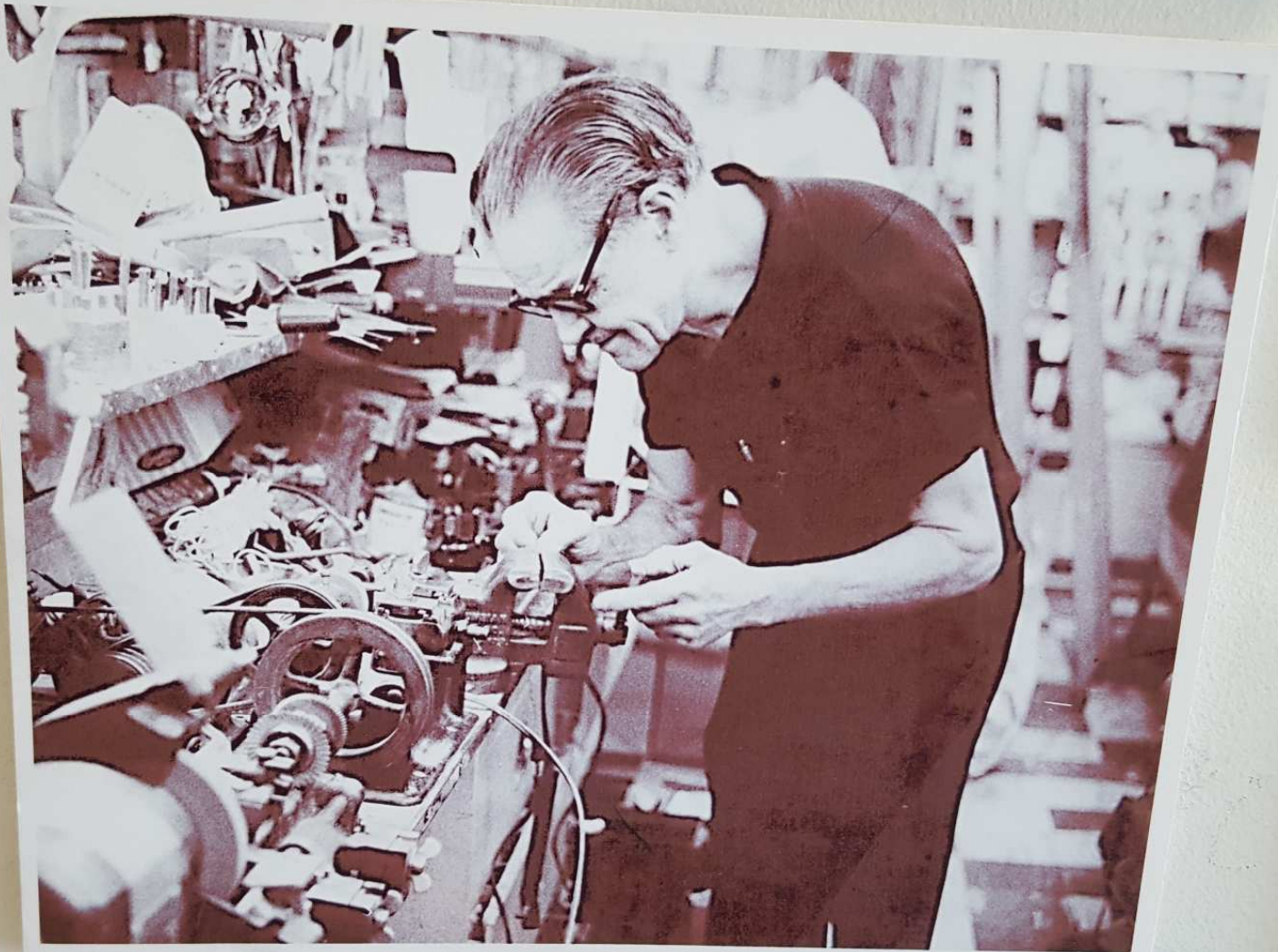




cliffsvaryety.com





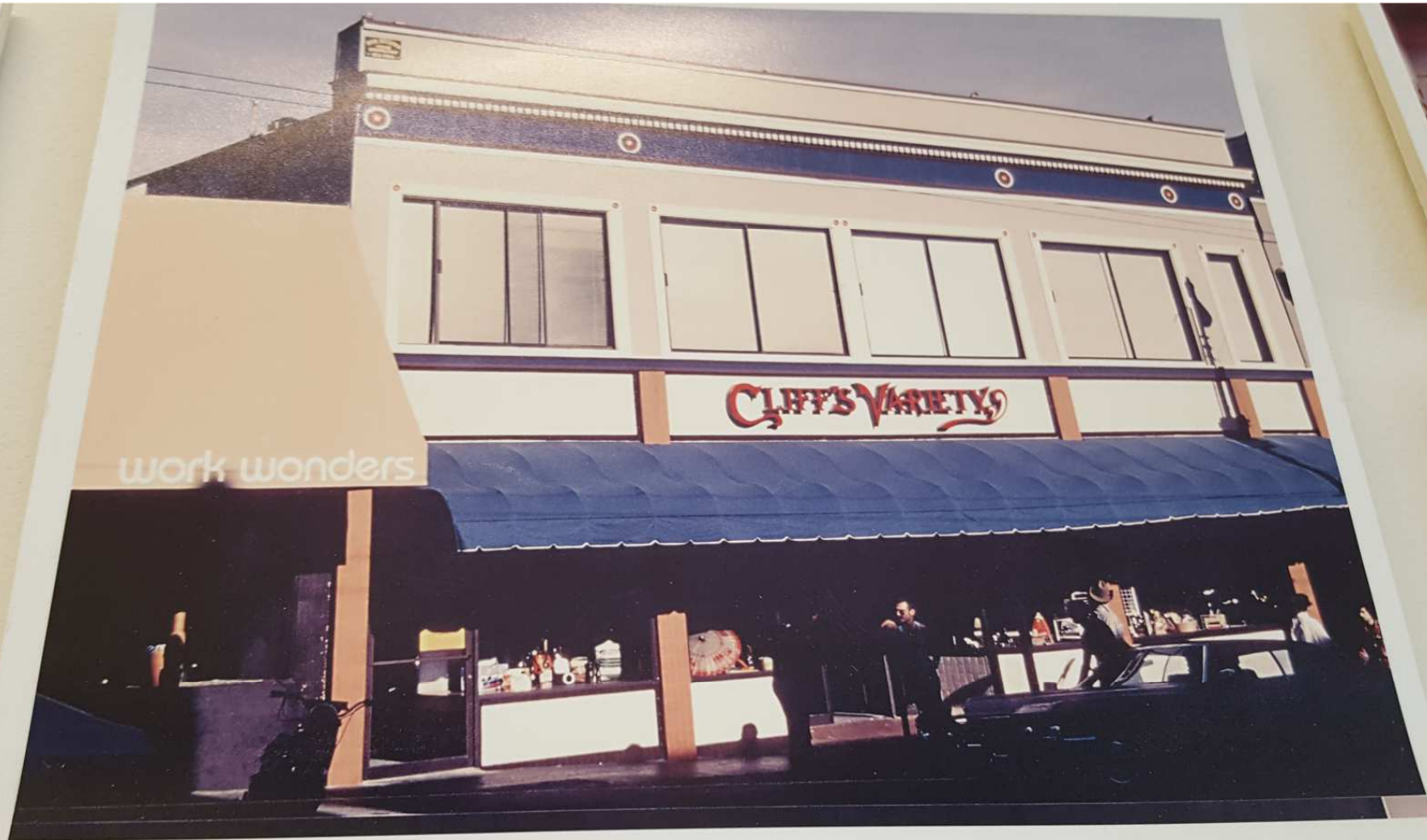












# CLIFF'S VARIETY

479









CLIFF'S VARIETY

471

CLIFF'S VARIETY

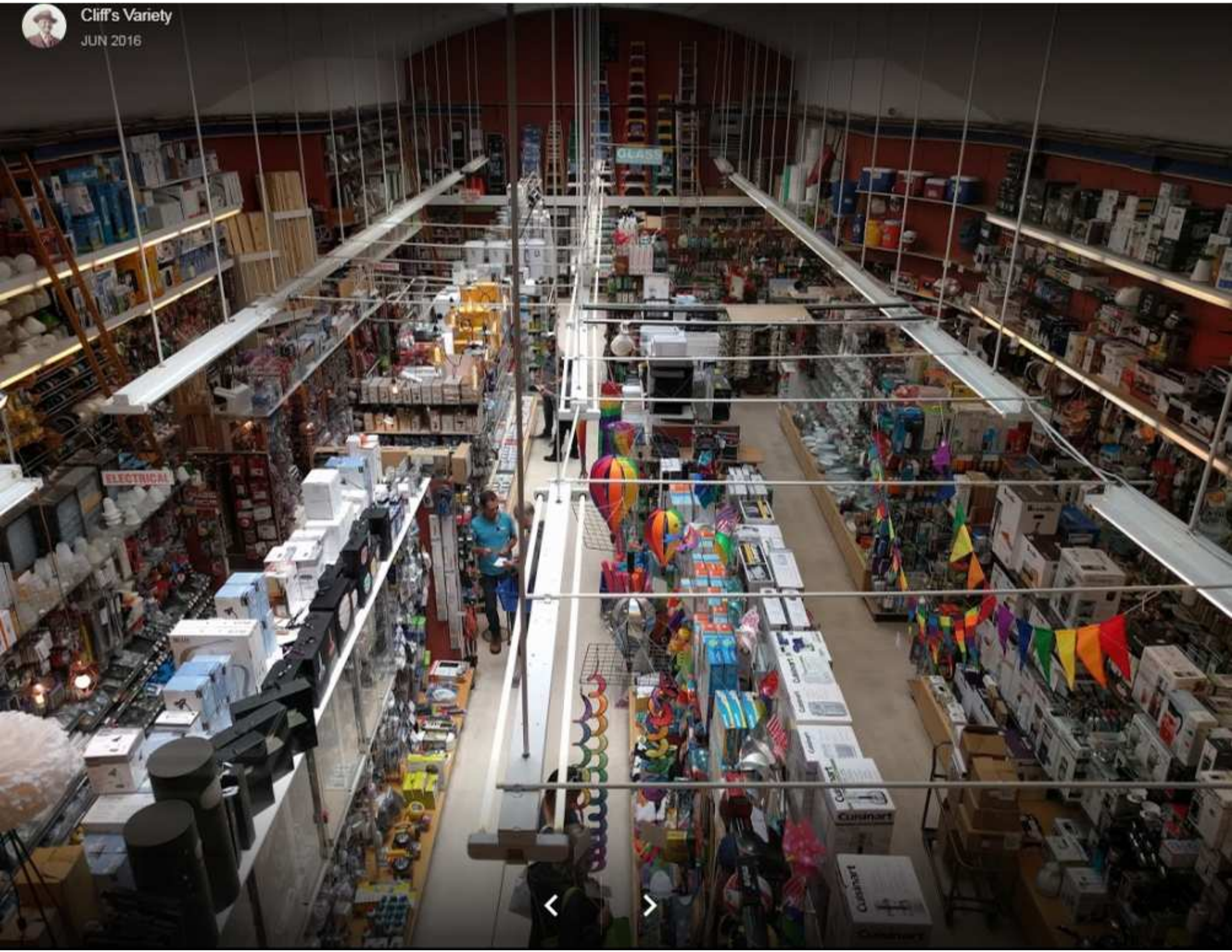




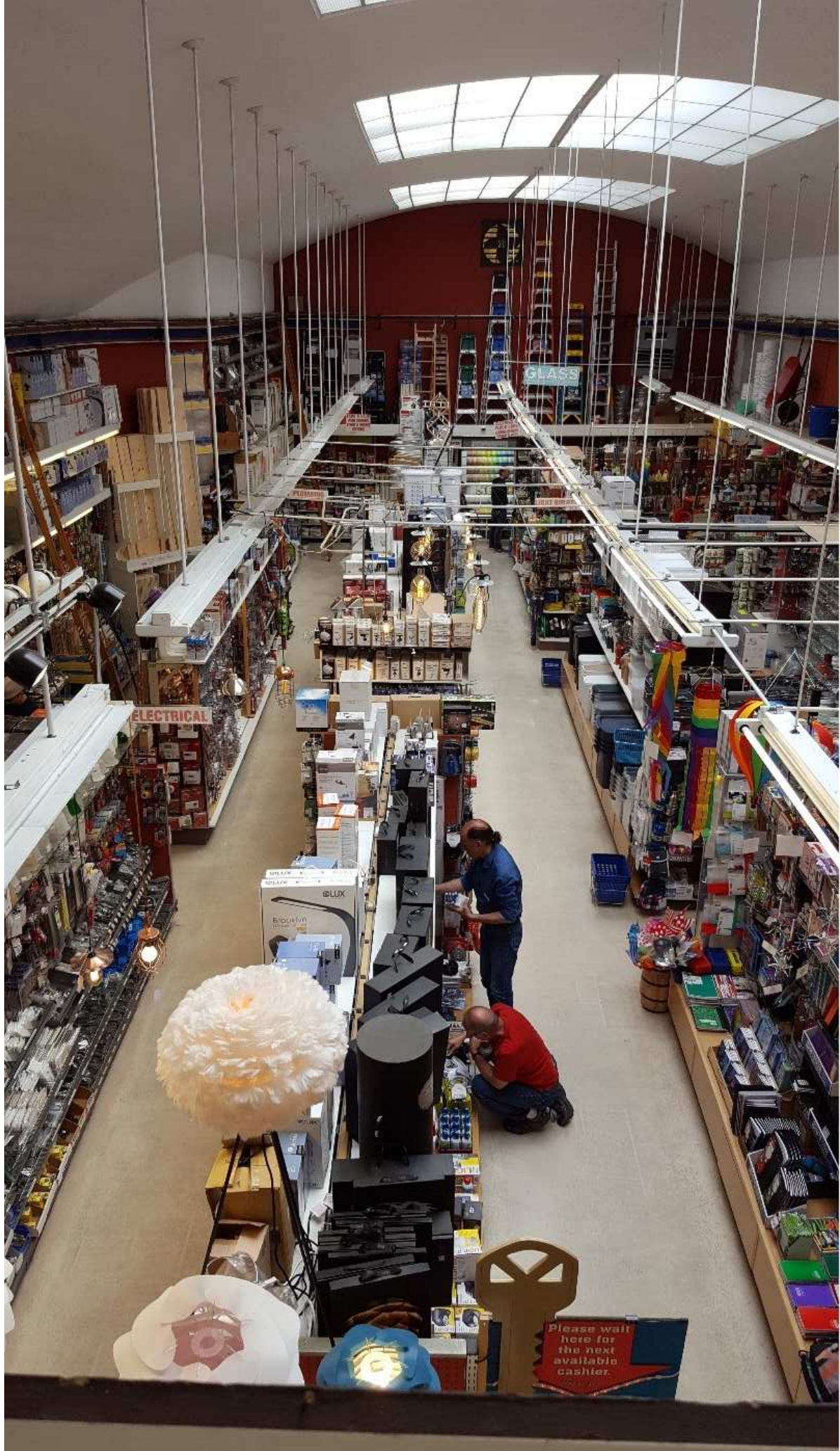


Cliff's Variety

JUN 2016



















# The importance of being ERNIE

By Susan Andrews

**A** MAN ENTERS sheepishly, his shoulders hunched together, locked in his own handcuffs. A homeowner lugs in the faucet fixture he removed trying to change the washer. A woman rushes in to say she dropped her housekey down the grate at the corner.

Rescue is on the house. One worker picks the lock, another changes the washer, and the grate man departs with magnet and twine.

This is Cliff's Variety Store, 479 Castro St., and here you can come by almost anything that's legal. French cutlery, Chinese baskets, Stillson wrenches and penny candy that still costs a penny. Christmas ornaments in August. A duplicate for the key to your grandmother's trunk.

Cliff's has everything from hardware to underwear, along with a repair service, a custom parts service and an unlimited supply of advice.

You probably wouldn't come from North Beach or the Marina to shop at Cliff's and if you live in the neighborhood, you're already a customer. But the story of Cliff's is really the story of Ernie DeBaca.

DeBaca lives two blocks from his store, owns three identical pairs of tailor-made black bellbottoms, and subsists on coffee, pie and four hours of sleep a night. He's been a boxer, a boilermaker and a banjoist. He is a natural-born businessman whose heart is as large as his store of goods, and in more than 50 years of doing business, he has done a lot of things with no thought of the bottom line.

Lena Sozzi has been with Cliff's the longest of anyone on the staff of 16, except for Ernie's grandson, Ernie Asten, who is now 30 and has been working in the store since he was 3. Sozzi thinks Cliff's succeeds



Ernie DeBaca, the driving force behind Cliff's Variety Store on Castro Street

Stewpots and laundry baskets grazed the peeling paint of the ceiling, the conveyor belts meandered over the walls, and the storeroom admitted no one beyond a depth of two feet.

By 1971, the rent was \$80 a month. One day in July, the landlord entered and announced that when the old lease expired, the rent would be \$1500 a month. DeBaca told the landlord he would move. The landlord just looked around and laughed.

When the landlord gave notice at No. 495, the Bon Ami store a few doors up was going out of business.

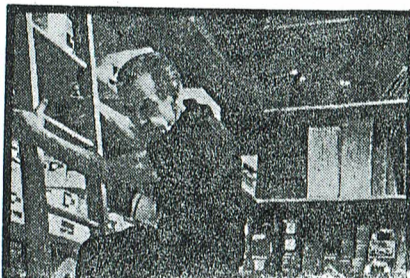
It was gloomy, but it was sound, DeBaca bought it, and for the first time in 50 years of doing business, he became his own landlord.

Ernie Asten took charge of the work crew, and renovations began. The skylights were scraped clean. A new floor was laid. Sixty-seven gallons of blue paint covered the walls; shelves went up, along with 200 feet of rolling ladder track (it just wouldn't be Cliff's without the ladders). Six hundred fifty tons of earth were excavated from beneath the store to create a full basement. Sunlight re-entered the building, and Cliff's moved to 479 Castro.

Ernie's partner for all these years had been his wife Alice. She was the one who had saved the \$41,000 down payment for the old Bon Ami store. The blue of the walls and of the awning out front is Alice's Blue. Long-time customers remember the vigorous, smiling woman who worked in the store with Ernie. Those of shorter duration knew a fragile, smiling woman who sat near the cash register.

She died in 1971, just after she and Ernie took title to the new store, and just a few months shy of their golden wedding anniversary.

"We never argued and we never fought," DeBaca says. "We were a team."





because Ernie's kindness just runs on on everybody else." Asten agrees. "In 50 years, my grandfather has never made an enemy," he says. "He doesn't know how."

Ask DeBacca himself why his staff is so loyal and he says, "I don't know, but I've never fired anyone. I just couldn't do that. If this isn't the place for them, they generally know it and leave."

Forty-eight years ago, when the neighborhood was mostly Irish police officers and their families, Ernie knew all his regular customers "by face."

On Christmas Eve, some of those regulars would find DeBacca in the store at 4 a.m., sorting out the toys they had put on layaway in September. "Nowadays," he reports, "Christmas isn't that big anymore, so I only stay 'til about 2."

Halloween, however, is very big. About two weeks before, Cliff's main window is appropriated by two witches and an animated wooden skeleton, a bubbling cauldron, assorted spiders, webs and other mood-enhancers. On Halloween Day the police close the street for the annual Halloween parade, which features costume-judging, talent show, pie-eating contests and prizes for all the winners. Photos of everyone are posted in Cliff's window the following week. Thirty years ago, DeBacca carved the skeleton from sugar pine and the witches from plaster of Paris, and he has been throwing this party for the neighborhood kids even longer.

DeBacca says he's been in business "for about a hundred years." Actually, it all started in Prescott, Ariz., where, with a rented horse and 12 helpers, he ran the popcorn wagon for the baseball games. He used to take in \$75 on a Saturday afternoon. Not bad for a 14-year-old kid.

That was his first venture on his own. But all his life he had worked in his father's stores. The elder DeBacca owned general stores in Prescott, Flagstaff and Cliffs, one at a time. Like his son, he would rather have one store that had everything than a whole chain of second-raters.

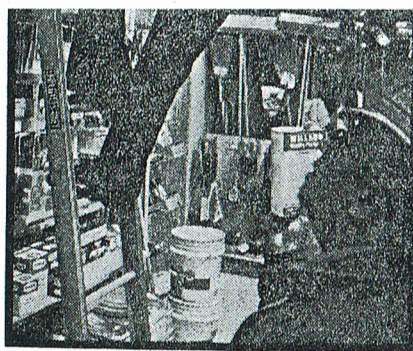
A lot of people call DeBacca Cliff. That's OK with him, but the real Cliff is Ernie's baby brother. Ernie always had a soft spot for Cliff, and in 1929, when he first opened a store on Castro Street, he named it after his brother. Cliff in turn was named after Cliffs, the small logging town where he was born. Cliff DeBacca lives in Santa Rosa and has no connection with the store. Cliff's Variety Store is thriving. Cliffs, Ariz., is now extinct.

DeBacca hated school. What he loved was running his father's store and fixing things, which just came naturally. "I never learned anything. I just did it."

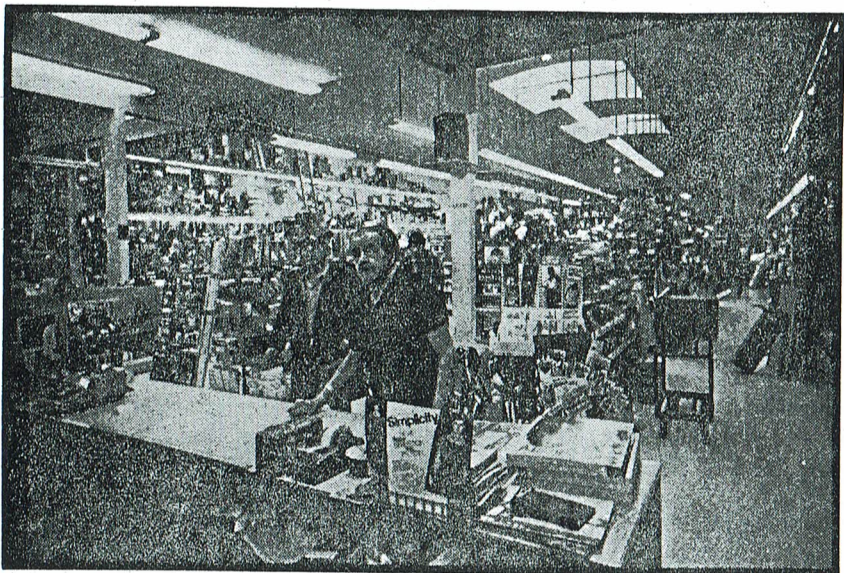
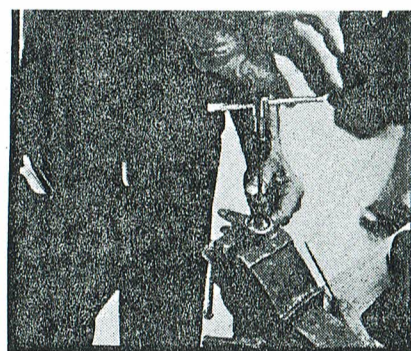
At 14 Ernie said he was 16 and got taken on by the Santa Fe Railroad as a boilermaker's apprentice. In 1920 he was transferred to the yard in Richmond, Calif., and he stayed there, making boilers and boxing on the railroad boxing team, until 1922 when the railroad workers went out on strike. During that strike, trains were derailed and looted, violence flared. DeBacca never went back.

Instead, with four limousines, he started the first taxi service in San Rafael. He bell-hopped at the Wilshire and played banjo for the Spanish Dons, his own dance band. (Cliff played sax.) Around 1925, he started up another business from a little shop on Eddy Street. He rode his blue Indian motorcycle around the city to do plumbing and electrical repairs. The shop on Castro was just an outpost that gave his ailing father something to do.

That first Cliff's was a tiny storefront, with candy



Cliff's offers personal service and plenty of merchandise amid its cheerful jumble



Examiner photos by Paul Glines

inside and second-hand magazines out front. The neighborhood kids would swipe the magazines, sell them back to the store at the going rate, and buy candy with the proceeds. In its first month, Cliff's took in seven dollars. This was not much, even in 1929.

The store survived and stayed in that same spot for 10 years. DeBacca moved his repair business over to Cliff's, and gradually enlarged his stock with sewing notions, then toys, then hardware — now his biggest seller. Even so, things were tight; the family used to erase their greeting cards and sell them in the store second-hand.

In those days," DeBacca says, "You couldn't afford to waste one penny. Nowadays, money is like water used to be. People have no idea of its value and still don't have enough."

The second Cliff's, still in the neighborhood, was

four times bigger than the old one, and the rent was \$60 a month. It remained there for more than 20 years. Expansion never stopped. Shelves were built from the floor to the 12-foot ceiling. DeBacca invented a system of seven motorized belts that conveyed and displayed the smaller items. Flip the switch and the entire stock of records, buttons, dyes, candy, keys, greeting cards and ribbons would travel the height of the wall, cross the ceiling and pass before your eyes. "People used to watch them by the hour," he recalls.

Cliff's III was located at 495 Castro, where the Village Deli and Donuts-&Things now stand. DeBacca made the move in 1960 because he liked the spot. "In business, location is everything. And the first block is always better than the second block." This store was more than twice as large as its predecessor. The ceiling was 15 feet high, and there was even a little storeroom in the back. But again, content triumphed over form.

Ernie met Alice in Richmond, where she was working in a music store, in 1921. He went there to buy an accordion. He and Alice kept company every Sunday for a year. "Nobody asked anybody. We just told our folks we were going to be married."

Alice and Ernie had a lot of fun. They went to Playland-at-the-Beach and to the movies, roller-skated, swam at Suto Baths, "all the usual things," as Ernie puts it. They had a baby. But what they mostly did was work together, and they loved it. "I would get these ideas," he recalls, "and Alice would be in there helping with both hands."

She kept the books for the repair business and manned the phones for the taxi service. She was the hostess for Ernie's dance band; for the Golden Gate Exposition of 1939 she hand-made 3,000 candy boxes in the shape of a Spanish Don. In 1939, they left DeBacca's father in charge of the store and went off to the World's Fair in Chicago. Coming home, they stopped off in Los Angeles for a visit and ended up in the wholesale candy business.

DeBacca invented the kite sacker, a large lollipop in the shape of a kite. Ernie poured and Alice wrapped, and the business boomed for the next six months.

Then they returned to San Francisco for a visit. As soon as old repair customers found out he was back in town, that was it. Ernie and Alice were back at Cliff's for good; for more than 20 years, Alice opened the store in the morning and went to the bank at the end of the day. Even in her last years, when she was frail, she insisted on going with Ernie to the store in her wheelchair and staying until he closed up at 10 p.m.

DeBacca misses her sorely. Sometimes," he says, "I feel like I'm just marking time."

Part of the secret of Cliffs is that it has always been a family affair. Ernie Asten and his wife Martha have been helping DeBacca run the store for more than seven years.

"Even though we are growing," says Martha Asten, "we are still a personal servicer. Our people don't just wave a customer to the back of the store and tell him, 'It's in there someplace.' They go and find it with him. And our customers know we'll take a special order for them, and if necessary, manufacture it ourselves."

"Growing up with my grandfather has taught me more than I could ever have learned any other way," says Ernie Asten. In college he majored in electrical engineering and he has done other things, but the spirit of Cliff's runs deep. "Working here, you never get bored. We have our own lathe and welder in the basement, and we can engineer our way out of any problem. Today I'm making a piglet for a customer who has an old bathtub that doesn't work because they don't make the parts for it anymore. The people who come to work here find out they are free to help people, and they enjoy it. We solve hundreds of problems every day."

DeBacca gives a lot of credit for Cliff's current success to the Astens and to his staff. He also gives his customers their due. Since the gay renaissance on Castro Street, business has never been better. "There's nothing like traffic for business and this street is busy day and night."

In the nearly 50 years since its beginning, Cliff's Variety Store has grown from a one-man candy shop into a thriving enterprise that makes any other store of its kind seem stuffy and barren. But there is no other store of its kind — only Cliff's has Ernie DeBacca.

What is his secret?

"Be natural, that's all."





## Cliff's Discovered the Castro Before We Did

Long before the Castro was a queer enclave, Cliff's Variety was up and running in the neighborhood. It's now been in business for 78 years, and is one of the oldest family-run businesses in all of San Francisco. Like the items it sells, Cliff's was built to last and is still going strong. Let's take a look back at some key moments in its still-evolving incredible history.



**1936**— Hilario DeBaca, a former merchant and schoolteacher from New Mexico, comes out of retirement to open Cliff's Variety at 545 Castro Street. DeBaca names the store after his youngest son, Clifford. The store sells a variety of goods including magazines, cigars, sewing notions, greeting cards, toys and candy.

**1942**— DeBaca moves his store to 515 Castro Street, providing him with double the original space. Gay men begin to move into the area as the U.S. military dishonorably discharges thousands of homosexual servicemen during World War II.

**1946**— DeBaca's oldest son Ernie sets up a workbench in the back of Cliff's Variety so that he can repair small appliances there for customers. Later that same year, Ernie produces the first Halloween street party on Castro Street.

**1952**— DeBaca dies. Ernie continues to work at the store, helped by other family members.





**1960**— Cliff's moves again, this time to 495 Castro Street. Ernie's amazing repair skills gain him fame. Customers bring in televisions, radios, toasters, lamps, locks, clocks, windows and even the proverbial kitchen sink. Ernie fixes all with ease.

**1960s**— Throughout the 60s, the Castro's LGBT population steadily climbs. Many purchase formerly neglected Victorians, outfitting them with goods purchased at Cliff's.

**1967**— The Summer of Love happens, bringing as many as 100,000 new young people to San Francisco. They converge upon the Haight-Ashbury, but also gather in other neighborhoods too.

**1971**— The landlord of 495 Castro Street tells Ernie DeBaca that his rent will triple. That same year, the five and dime store Bon Omi goes out of business and Ernie purchases it in August. The re-located Cliff's is now at 479 Castro Street. Product lines are expanded to meet the needs and desires of the still-growing LGBT population. From then on, shoppers can get a plaster ceiling medallion, a feather boa, a toilet fill valve, a rhinestone tiara, and toys for the nieces and nephews all in one place!

**1970s**— Ernie and his wife Martha's two daughters—Marian and Terry—are born. Marian later moves north for a life in the country. Terry spends her high school years working at the store.

**1980s**— Cliff's popularity continues to rise. As the business flourishes, so does its need for more space. In the late 80s, a Hallmark Card shop adjacent to Cliff's becomes available for lease. Ernie and Martha quickly jump at the opportunity, making 471 Castro Street their new home for Cliff's fabric and linens, as well as bedding and bath accessories.

**1990s**— Cliff's becomes the owner of its retail space, leading to remodeling and even more goods. 471 Castro Street is now called "Cliff's Annex." In the late 1990s, Terry returns home from college and chooses to carry on the family tradition by taking over operations at the store.

**2003**— Terry has a daughter who may one day be the next generation to carry on the family history of Cliff's Variety.

**2014**— Terry and her husband Rich Bennett have a blast posing for *San Francisco Bay Times* photographer and designer Abby Zimberg, and wish you all a joy-filled holiday season!

### **Holiday Magic Happens Every Day of the Year at Cliff's Variety**



Rumor has it that some of Santa's LGBT elves left the North Pole for sunnier San Francisco and set up shop at Cliff's Variety, where kids of all ages can experience glowing queer holiday magic all year long. Even general manager Terry Asten Bennett, whose family owns the Castro-based landmark, lights up thinking about the store's latest toys and housewares.



“The new Breville appliances are very well made,” she said, “and RC cars (which perform stunts, pop wheelies, light up, and more) are hard to resist. Last year’s must-have item for kids, loom bands, are still popular, but we have new building and science sets too.” When asked what newly arrived offerings are her faves, she replied: “I think most of us want one of everything.”

Cliff’s visitors can peruse the store’s full line of Fuller O’Brien paints for home improvement projects, gorgeous Victorian and Art Deco doorknobs and lock plates for restoration needs, snazzy doorbell buttons, colorful housewares, fabrics and crafts galore, tiaras and boas to make anyone feel like a star and, of course, one of the best selections of holiday items. This is only just scratching the surface of what’s available in the literally packed-to-the-rafters store.



“We have four head buyers,” Asten Bennett said, helping to explain how Cliff’s manages to stock such an astounding array of fabulous items. “They travel to shows in Chicago, Las Vegas, Atlanta and other cities,” she added.

In addition to being a shopping paradise, Cliff's has also been a work saver for us, with one or more *San Francisco Bay Times* staff members running there for zip ties (to hold up banners on parade vehicles), office supplies, and goodness knows what else. The store is a true treasure in our neighborhood, and we don't know what we'd do without it.

Cliff's is fully integrated into our LGBT community, giving back whenever possible. For example, from Friday, November 28, through Sunday, November 30, if you give \$5 or more to the School Support Fund via Cliff's, you'll receive 20% off your transaction and the raised money will go to support the Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy. If you do the math, and depending on what you purchase, the savings will quickly start to add up, all while you contribute to a great cause.

*Cliff's is at 479 Castro Street. San Francisco, CA 94114, telephone 415-431-5365,  
<http://www.cliffsvariety.com/index.html>*

<http://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Hardware-stores-hammer-out-creative-Valentine-s-6080213.php#photo-7524024>

# San Francisco Chronicle

## Hardware stores hammer out creative Valentine's Day displays

By Steve Rubenstein

February 13, 2015

Selling a toilet seat in San Francisco has never been more exciting than right now, when hardware stores are engaged in a quirky battle of display windows in honor of Valentine's Day.

It's all for love. Also art and good plumbing.

For years, San Francisco hardware stores have tried to outdo one another with oddball, arty, hardware-inspired displays in their front windows. If Macy's can put live puppies in its front window for Christmas, the thinking goes, why can't Cole Fox Hardware put a toilet seat in its front window for Valentine's Day?

So there's a toilet seat in the window at Cole's. And there are four flexible toilet supply pipes in the window of Brownies Hardware, twisted into the shape of a heart. There is a glowing heart in the window of Cliff's Variety hardware store, illuminated by the amazing \$50 remote-controlled lightbulb being offered for sale inside.

And there are antique tools in the windows at Papenhausen and Roberts, all designed to set a certain kind of throbbing heart to flutter on this day of days.

“Just because someone is looking for a toilet seat does not mean he has left behind his sense of humor,” said Frank Robles, who has been designing the three display windows at Cliff’s on Castro Street for eight years. The main window has a white plastic heart that glows red, blue, green and yellow in rotation, and it’s adorned with the words of Martin Luther King Jr:

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.”

The Rev. King and St. Valentine, along with the amazing \$50 remote-controlled lightbulb, all joining forces to fight prejudice, spread love and move the merchandise.



Image 1 of 6

Brownies Hardware on Polk Street celebrates Valentine’s Day by achieving extraordinary results with ordinary objects.

Photo: Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle



Robles changes the windows every few months, whenever the muse strikes. His windows have featured drag queen mannequins puking glitter, along with more sedate concepts involving an old-fashioned washtub on a rotating pedestal. The idea, he said, is to get people to come inside.

“We’re on Castro Street — we have to put on a show,” Robles said. “We have an amazing canvas here to work with.”

His boss, store owner Ernie Astin, agreed. The more glitter-puking mannequins, the better.

“Boring windows don’t sell anything,” he said.



Image 2 of 6

Imaginative window displays have resulted in design awards at Cole Fox Hardware on Fourth Street.  
Photo: Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

## Potential distraction

The windows are so distracting that they might be why a motorist crashed his Mercedes-Benz through one of Cliff's windows last summer, seriously damaging the glitter-puking mannequin as well as the Mercedes.

The store is still restoring that window to its former glory. Robles cradled the mannequin in his arms, carried her to his upstairs workshop and performed major surgery, saving her life. She'll be back in action for his top-secret Easter window, he vowed.

At Papenhausen Hardware on West Portal Avenue, owner Matt Rogers said the store's windows are designed to put at ease passersby who are all thumbs and who might otherwise be "intimidated" by a hardware store.



Image 3 of 6

Cliff's Variety on Castro Street observes Valentine's Day with colorful windows.

Photo: Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle





Image 4 of 6

Cliff's Variety on Castro Street celebrates Valentine's Day with an imaginative display.

Photo: Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

## **In search of art**

The current window features antique saws and wood planes abandoned in mid-job, as if the carpenter had just set aside her tools for a Valentine's Day tryst. Past windows have included a whimsical 4-foot-high wooden iPod that Rogers called an "iPod Macro." That one got people talking. The store doesn't sell iPods. The customers came in anyway and bought screwdrivers.

"Whimsy is OK, sometimes," Rogers said. "It's not our core product."

Which brings up the key question in the arty hardware window war — isn't the nuts and bolts of hardware stores nuts and bolts? Are customers in search of a toilet seat searching for fine art?

Yes, said Will Schindler, floor manager at Cole's Fox Hardware on Fourth Street, they are. The Cole's windows, which have been scooping up design awards the way Cole's shovels scoop up other things, are a masterwork.

In one window, a smooth toilet seat is juxtaposed next to a smooth giant chess piece. Is the lavatory a giant game? Are bathroom users but pawns, with the player moving the pieces unknown?

In another window, dozens of keys, screwdrivers and scissors hang suspended in midair on invisible fishing lines.

"We're trying to say something," Schindler said. "I don't know what. We're trying to draw people in."

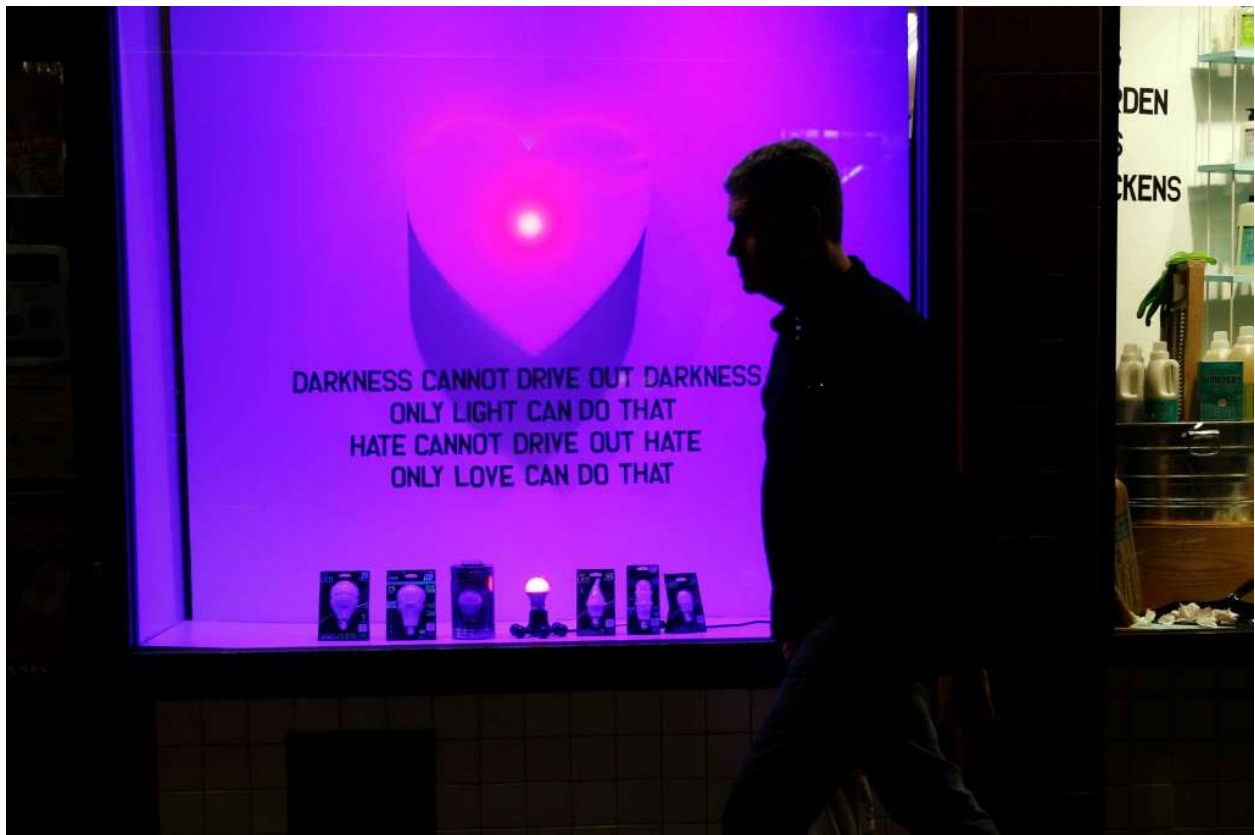


Image 5 of 6

A window vividly marks Valentine's Day at Cliff's Variety on Castro Street in San Francisco.  
Photo: Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

## Burning Man

At Roberts Hardware on Haight Street, the front window changes against a background display of 50-year-old hand tools. Owner Bruce Smith said the tools were owned by his father, the original Robert for whom the store was named.

At Burning Man time, Smith said, the tool display is augmented by a slew of artfully arranged Burning Man supplies. On the Fourth of July, there's a barbecue grill with glowing red lights to represent the coals.

At Brownies on Polk Street, there are giant hearts in the window. One is made from a bike cable, its ends secured with a red padlock. Another is made with four flexible pipes that are commonly seen supplying water to toilet tanks.



Image 6 of 6

A creative display at Cole Fox Hardware on Fourth Street celebrates Valentine's Day.

Photo: Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

## **Battling big-box stores**

Owners of small hardware stores, one and all, said there is a big reason to do something to stand out. The big reason is the existence of big-box hardware stores.

The real battle is not between local hardware stores. The real battle is between local hardware stores and the behemoths. There's nothing whimsical about that one.

"Many of the people who come in here come from places where local hardware stores have been wiped out by Home Depot," Schindler said. "These people just don't have their old hardware store anymore. So they look at our window, and they come in here laughing. You don't do that at Home Depot."

*Steve Rubenstein is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer. E-mail:*  
*[srubenstein@sfchronicle.com](mailto:srubenstein@sfchronicle.com)*



<http://hoodline.com/2016/05/80-years-and-counting-castro-s-cliff-s-variety-recognized-as-best-small-business-in-california>



## 80 Years And Counting: Castro's Cliff's Variety Recognized As Best Small Business In California



General manager Terry Asten Bennett (center) surrounded by some of her employees at Cliff's Variety. (Photo courtesy of Cliff's Variety).

Sat. May 28, 2016, 8:55am  
by Shane Downing

Location  
479 Castro St, San Francisco, CA

“We have what you want.” That’s the slogan of Castro Street’s very own [Cliff’s Variety](#), which come the first week of June, will celebrate its 80th anniversary in the neighborhood.

In the spirit of Small Business Week, not to mention the fact that the [store was recently named](#) the 2016 Small Business of the Year by the California Small Business Association just a few days ago, we caught up with Terry Asten Bennett, Cliff’s general manager and the great, great grand-daughter of store founder Hilario DeBaca.



**Photo: Shane Downing/Hoodline**

Founded in 1936 and named for Hilario's youngest son, Clifford, the variety store [has had a rich history](#) over the decades — although Asten Bennett admitted that they’re not exactly sure of when Cliff’s set up shop. “When we were getting ready to celebrate our 75th anniversary, we could not find the day we actually opened,” Asten Bennett said. “We know it was the year 1936, and so we picked June 6th as our anniversary date because that was grandpa Ernie’s birthday.”

Asten Bennett is more confident about the store’s formula for success. “I think the best thing we’ve done is we’ve changed with the neighborhood and we’ve catered to what the neighborhood needs and is looking for,” Asten Bennett said. “Because we have such a variety of stuff, when one area is not doing well, we’re able to change it up with something different.”





Terry Asten Bennett is the general manager at Cliff's and grew up in the store. **Photo: Shane Downing/Hoodline**

Cliff's sells exactly what its name implies: a variety of goods. From its home improvement selection to its cooking department, its art department to its selection of fabrics and textiles, the store is truly a catchall shop. "I think the most important thing we've done," said Asten Bennett, "is we've given a lot of ownership to what we carry to our employees. We let our employees make a lot of choices about what's going on in the store. They participate in the buying, they participate in the merchandising."

Asten Bennett, who was born and raised in the Castro and who grew up around the store, worked at Cliff's throughout high school and returned after college in 1997. "I don't remember what year we promoted me," she laughed. She and her family now live near the Cow Palace in the city. "I wasn't able to afford to buy in the Castro," she said.



A snapshot of Cliff's Variety's... of goods. **Photo: Shane Downing/Hoodline**

Regardless of where she calls home, Asten Bennett still maintains a good sense of how the Castro has changed over the years. “Some things in the neighborhood are exactly the same, and some things are completely different. [Rossi’s Delicatessen is still there](#),” she said, “and a lot of the flavor of the neighborhood is still the same. A lot has changed.”

“The biggest challenge is dealing with city politics and city regulations,” Asten Bennett said. “We’ve always worked really hard to take care of our employees, and every time the city or the state mandates a benefit, they’ve actually mandated it in such a way that it’s taken away from what we’ve been offering.”

She provided the example of the store’s sick pay policy. “Long before that law was ever put in, we paid our employees; they had a week of paid sick leave and if they didn’t use it, we paid it out at time and a half the following year,” explained Asten Bennett. “The sick pay law requires it be rolled over and that we can’t pay it out.”





Asten Bennett (left) pictured with Marian (right), an employee at Cliff's. **Photo: Shane Downing/Hoodline**

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“The city wide policy changes, I understand that on a big scale, they may think they look good, but they aren’t actually looking at the entire picture.”

Cliff’s has always cared about the well-being of its employees. Although she was quite young during the AIDS epidemic, Asten Bennett remembers the fear and uncertainty of those times. “Our store felt it acutely. We watched our customers walk in healthy one week and gaunt and diminished the following week.”

“When our first employee was diagnosed with AIDS,” said Asten Bennett, “we brought in a long-term disability plan to make sure that our employees would have a continuing quality of life whether they could only work part time or not work at all. We’ve always been supportive of all the fundraisers going on, but really it was about being humans and being there for the people.”



Cliff's has been a longtime ally to the neighborhood's LGBTQ community. **Photo: Shane Downing/Hoodline**

The store currently employs 41 employees, including Franc, who has been decorating the storefront windows for over 10 years. In Asten Bennett's opinion, Cliff's "fabulous windows" are what the variety store is best known for. "We have incredibly talented and creative people with really twisted, quirky senses of humor — we let them loose."

Along with her employees, Asten Bennett is joined in the store on a daily basis by her parents, Ernie and Martha, and husband, Richard. Interestingly enough, the man whose name the store is named after, founder and retired school teacher Hilario DeBaca's youngest son, Cliff, never worked a day in the store. According to Asten Bennett, "[he named it after his son Cliff](#), who was a saxophone player. He wanted Cliff to get a 'real job,' so Cliff never worked here. It was Cliff's brother, Ernie, who took over the store and [the store] came down the family on that side."





Cliff's infamous window displays. **Photo: Shane Downing/Hoodline**

Whether it's the window displays or the range of offerings, Cliff's has never really struggled to attract a crowd. "We have customers that have been here my entire life and before," Asten Bennett said. Besides welcoming a large, loyal contingent of neighborhood patrons to the store, Cliff's also sees its fair share of tourists.

"You can feel the ebb and flow of the F-Market. Every time the F-Market stops, there's a wave of tourists coming in, and it seems like whole countries go on vacation at the same time," Asten Bennett laughed. "One week we'll hear nothing but French, and the next week it will be your Japanese tourists and then your German tourists."



A customer checks out at Cliff's. **Photo: Shane Downing/Hoodline**

In light of the [Castro's recent string of burglaries](#), Cliff's general manager said that although the store hasn't been the victim of a burglary, another genre of crime has become a particularly annoying thorn in the store's side. "Shoplifting has run rampant with our special friends on the street," Asten Bennett said. "It really picked up [when the sidewalk widening started](#). That seemed to attract a new breed of traveler. It's been an ongoing challenge."

Whereas a number of neighborhood businesses have been [subjected to rent hikes](#), Cliff's general manager was quick to add that her store is lucky to own the building it operates in. "We bought the main building in 1971, and then in the late '80s, we were fortunate enough to be able to buy the Annex side."





A shot of Cliff's Variety, moments after walking through the front doors. **Photo: Shane Downing/Hoodline**

She did, however, have advice for newer neighborhood businesses that are trying to get off the ground. “Get out there and be vocal. Find your niche. Make your business inviting. Do things to draw people in. Get them talking, and if you’re struggling, talk to your employees,” said Astin Bennett. “They’re the most amazing source of advice. They’re down there listening to what the customers want and are looking for.”

It’s this kind of mindset and approach that has elevated Cliff’s Variety to statewide recognition. This past Wednesday, the Castro’s very own Cliff’s was recognized by the [California Small Business Association](#) 2016 Small Business of the Year.



From left to right: Asten Bennett's husband Richard, daughter Camille, Asten Bennett, Assemblymember David Chiu, Ernie and Martha Asten. (Photo courtesy of Cliff's Variety)

“Last month, I received a phone call from Assemblyman Chiu saying that he wanted to nominate us as the best small business in California from his assembly district. [Earlier this week], we went up to Sacramento and were honored with that award. It’s really exciting to be seen on a statewide level,” Asten Bennett said.

Upon asking her what the award meant to her and to Cliff’s, the general manager said “The thing we’re most grateful for is the community that supports us. I dedicated my life to being here for the community and the store and I intend to keep that. My 12-year-old, Camille, was raised in the store and thus far, she thinks it’s a good idea to keep it going.”





Cliff's Variety carries an array of goods. **Photo: Shane Downing/Hoodline**

Only time will tell whether or not Cliff's has another 80 years in it; however, for now, diehard Cliff's patrons can look forward to 80th anniversary sales sometime in July, although Asten Bennett said that "we don't limit celebrating small businesses to just one week a year."

"San Francisco and the Castro have been an ever changing scene, I think anyone who's been here for any amount of time will know that good stuff happens, bad stuff happens, and we just keep on ticking. When it gets really bad, we pray for an earthquake," she joked.

"We're gonna keep doing what we're doing," Asten Bennett said. "I mean obviously we're doing something right."

*That concludes our coverage of Small Business Week in the Castro. In case you missed it, we caught with [Rossi's Deli](#) and [Pioneer Renewer](#) earlier in the week. Like Asten Bennett said, however, we also don't limit celebrating small businesses to just one week a year. We like to cover businesses not just when they open or close, or when they're burglarized or burned. If you have a small business that you would like to see Hoodline feature, [send us a tip](#) or leave a comment below.*



Small Business Owner  
25 or More Employees

Terry Asten Bennett  
Owner  
Cliff's Variety

*Celebrating 25 Years  
of Small Business Advocacy  
1984-2009*



*The City and County of San Francisco*

# *Certificate of Honor*

*Presented To*

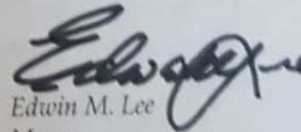
**CLIFF'S VARIETY**

**FEBRUARY 5, 2015**

*WHEREAS*, on behalf of the City and County of San Francisco, I am pleased to recognize and honor Terry Asten Bennett and Cliff's Variety for your steadfast commitment to the vitality of our small business community and the legacy of our neighborhoods, including the Castro, where Cliff's has served the needs of our communities for nearly 80 years. Thank you for your dedication to our City, your service as a delegate of the Castro Merchants Association and your life-long commitment to running the family store so residents and visitors alike can enjoy all it has to offer. Congratulations on being recognized with the well-deserved 2015 Merchant of the Year Award from the San Francisco Council of District Merchants Associations in recognition of your contributions to our City's small business community and the entrepreneurial and friendly spirit that reflect the best of San Francisco. We are pleased to honor and recognize the vital economic, social, and cultural contributions that Cliff's Variety provides for our communities and City and wish you the best of luck in all your future endeavors.



*THEREFORE*, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the City and County of San Francisco to be affixed.

  
Edwin M. Lee

Mayor





**THE HONORABLE FIONA MA**

*California State Board of Equalization Member*

*Joins with*

*San Francisco Council of District Merchants Associations*

*In Recognizing*

***Terry Asten Bennett***

**◆ Cliff's Variety◆**

**Gala Celebration and Awards Dinner**

*In Recognition of Outstanding Service &  
Dedication to the Community.*

*Congratulations and Best Wishes for Continued Success.*

---

**Fiona Ma, CPA**

**Member – District 2**

**California State Board of Equalization**

*Dated this 5th Day of February, 2015*

# *Certificate of Honor*

**City and County of San Francisco  
Office of the Assessor-Recorder**

*The Office of Assessor-Recorder of the City and County of San Francisco hereby issues and authorizes the execution of the Certificate of Honor in beholden public recognition of distinction and excellence for esteemed service to a significant portion of the people of the City and County of San Francisco by:*

**TERRY ASTEN BENNET**

*Castro Merchants Association*

On the auspicious day of the San Francisco Council of District Merchants Association's 2015 Gala Celebration and Awards Dinner, I am pleased to honor Terry Asten Bennet for her dedication to serve and support the business community in San Francisco. The Office of the Assessor-Recorder extends best wishes on all of your future endeavors.



A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "C. Chu", written over a horizontal line.

**Carmen Chu**  
Assessor-Recorder of San Francisco  
February 5, 2015





*The City and County of San Francisco*  
**PROCLAMATION**  
**CLIFF'S VARIETY DAY**  
**JUNE 2, 2016**

**WHEREAS**, Cliff's Variety celebrates its 80th anniversary in business on June 6, 2016; and

**WHEREAS**, Cliff's Variety over the years has served San Francisco's Castro neighborhood from four locations in its neighborhood, and since 1971 at 479 Castro Street; and

**WHEREAS**, Cliff's Variety honorably fulfills its motto "We Have What You Need" with goods and services such as home improvement and repair products, including authentic reproductions of historic Victorian, Art Deco and other architectural ornamentation; home décor; housewares; art and stationery supplies; fabrics and crafts; toys, fun and games; locksmith services; glass shop service; home repair service referrals; and seasonal and holiday merchandise, including unique specialty items highly valued for LGBTQ Pride, as well as Halloween, and other celebrations; and

**WHEREAS**, Cliff's Variety has been under the same family's ownership and management throughout its eight decades and spanning six generations, beginning with Hilario DeBaca (who named the store for his youngest son, Clifford); succeeded by Hilario's oldest son Ernie and his wife Alice; then Lorraine Asten (Ernie's daughter and Hilario's granddaughter); followed by Lorraine's son and today's patriarch of Cliff's, Ernie Asten and his wife Martha; and now their daughter and Cliff's General Manager, Terry Asten Bennett (and her husband Rich); and perhaps then to be succeeded by Terry and Rich's teenage daughter Camille Bennett; and

**WHEREAS**, Cliff's Variety was an early leader among Castro area businesses which welcomed LGBTQ residents as they moved into The Castro beginning in the 1960's, becoming what is recognized as a world-renowned neighborhood significant for its LGBTQ life and culture; and

**WHEREAS**, Cliff's Variety continuously provides generous support for causes and non-profit groups in its community; and

**WHEREAS**, Cliff's Variety recently was honored by California Assemblymember David Chiu for nomination among a select statewide group as a "California Small Business of the Year" representing San Francisco Assembly District 17; and

**WHEREAS**, Cliff's Variety is widely beloved and respected in The Castro and elsewhere by its customers, local residents, industry peers and suppliers, and fellow Castro merchants; now, therefore, be it

**RESOLVED**, That the Board of Supervisors proclaims June 2, 2016, to be Cliff's Variety Day in the City and County of San Francisco.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Scott Wiener".

Scott Wiener

威善高

Member, Board of Supervisors

June 2, 2016





SAN FRANCISCO

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO  
EDWIN M. LEE, MAYOR

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS  
REGINA DICK-ENDRIZZI, DIRECTOR

## Legacy Business Registry

# Application Review Sheet

*Application No.:* LBR-2017-18-008  
*Business Name:* Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano  
*Business Address:* 1042 Kearny Street  
*District:* District 3  
*Applicant:* Carmen Crotti, Co-owner  
*Nomination Date:* April 24, 2017  
*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?       X       Yes                      No

1042 Kearny Street from 1971 to Present (46 years)

**CRITERION 2:** Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?       X       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?       X       Yes                      No

**NOTES:** NA

**DELIVERY DATE TO HPC:** October 19, 2017

Richard Kurylo  
Manager, Legacy Business Program



Member, Board of Supervisors  
District 3



City and County of San Francisco

**AARON PESKIN**

佩斯金 市參事

April 24, 2017

Director Regina Dick-Endrizzi  
San Francisco Office of Small Business  
City Hall, Room 110  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Director Dick-Endrizzi,

It is my honor and privilege to nominate Tomasso's Ristorante Italiano for inclusion on the San Francisco Legacy Business Registry.

Since 1935, Tomasso's has served delicious, classic Italian food to North Beach residents and visitors. Opened by the Cantolupo family, who had recently emigrated from Naples, Italy, Tomasso's has held onto its original family recipes even through transferring ownership to the Crotti family. Tomasso's brick pizza oven has delighted and inspired many a connoisseur, Alice Waters and Wolfgang Puck among them, and the venue is destined to remain a local favorite for decades to come.

Tomasso's Ristorante Italiano is a beacon of the neighborhood, absolutely deserving of inclusion on the Legacy Business Registry. After decades of enjoying the company of their staff, and the splendors of their menu, it is my sincere pleasure to nominate it for inclusion.

Sincerely,

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

Aaron Peskin

## Section One:

### Business / Applicant Information. 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:		
Tommasos Ristorante Italiano		
BUSINESS OWNER(S) (Identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business)		
Carmen Crotti (co-owner, 50%) Agostino Crotti (co-owner, 50%)		
CURRENT BUSINESS ADDRESS:		TELEPHONE:
1042 Kearny Street San Francisco, CA 94114		415-398-9096
EMAIL:		
carmen@tommasos.com		
WEBSITE:	FACEBOOK PAGE:	YELP PAGE:
tommasos.com	Tommasos Restaurant	tommasos-ristorante-italiano-san-francisco
APPLICANT'S NAME		
Carmen Crotti		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Same as Business
APPLICANT'S TITLE		
co-owner		
APPLICANT'S ADDRESS:		TELEPHONE:
85 Roosevelt Way Apt #3 San Francisco, CA 94114		(415) 519-5936
EMAIL:		
carmen@tommasos.com		
SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS ACCOUNT NUMBER:		SECRETARY OF STATE ENTITY NUMBER (if applicable):
008051		
OFFICIAL USE: Completed by OSS Staff		
NAME OF NOMINATOR:		DATE OF NOMINATION:



## 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
1042 Kearny Street	94133	Sep 1935
IS THIS LOCATION THE FOUNDING LOCATION OF THE BUSINESS?	DATES OF OPERATION AT THIS LOCATION	
<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	1935 - present	

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 and a business deemed not current in 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 the Business Assistance Grant.

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.

CARMEN CROTTI  
Name (Print):

10.4.17  
Date:

  
Signature:

## **TOMMASO'S RISTORANTE ITALIANO**

### **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 headquarterd location) and the opening dates and locations of all other locations.**

Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano was established in 1971, with origins dating back to 1935.

In 1935, the Cantalupo family from Naples immigrated to America and opened a small, cozy Neapolitan restaurant, Lupo's, in the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco. Lupo's wasn't the first Italian restaurant in the neighborhood, but the first to bring home-style Neapolitan cuisine to the area. The most notable thing they introduced was their wood-fired brick oven, which baked most of their food, including specialties such as their veal dishes and the West Coast's first taste of pizza. The year that Lupo's opened, the Cantalupos hired a local artist to paint depictions of their native Naples on canvas lining the walls of the restaurant. Legend has it the Cantalupo's paid the artist in plates of spaghetti and meatballs.

In 1971, the Cantalupo's gave the business, but not the restaurant's name, to their longtime chef Tommy "Tommaso" Chin. Tommaso was a nickname that the Cantalupo's gave him, which is the Italianized version of the name Tommy. Consequently, Tommy renamed the restaurant Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano, keeping the same recipes and traditions that the Cantalupo family started.

In 1973, Tommy Chin sold the restaurant to the Crotti Family from Lake Como, Italy. Though Tommy was a great chef and thoroughly enjoyed cooking, managing a restaurant was not his passion. Tommy met Agostino Crotti, a young server at the local Cafe Trieste, where Tommy went regularly for coffee and pastries. Agostino and the rest of his family – mother and father Maria and Egidio Crotti, along with his siblings – expressed interest in taking over the restaurant. In September of 1973, the Crottis officially took over Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano. The restaurant's name, recipes, decor and spirit have been constant for the past 44 years.

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

Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano thankfully has not encountered circumstances that required the restaurant to cease operations in San Francisco for more than six months.

Note – The location of Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano, and previously Lupo's, has always been at 1042 Kearny Street.



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

Though not owned by the original owners, Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano has been a family-run operation for the past three generations of Crottis. In 1973, the recent immigrants Maria and Egidio Crotti took over Tommaso's from former owner and chef Tommy Chin, keeping the name Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano.

Egidio and Maria Crotti worked alongside their children, Carmen, Agostino, and Lidia. Each one had a role to play. Egidio did most of the food prep, along with washing dishes. Maria ran the oven, making pizzas and cooking different dishes within it. Carmen and Agostino waited tables, and Lidia cooked in the kitchen, and helped Maria make pizza from time to time.

Under the patronage of a new family, the Crottis made Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano a very special place for families, tourists and especially locals. The Crottis kept roughly 90% of Lupo's recipes, but added some of their own, including family recipes for their lasagna, Coo-Coo clams and tiramisu. Even with the transition of new ownership, the Crotti's retained most of the patrons that frequented Lupo's and Tommy Chin's ownership of Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano.

Unfortunately in the early 2000s, Maria and Egidio Crotti passed away, and consequently Carmen and Agostino Crotti took over full ownership of Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano.

To this day, Agostino makes the pizza dough, Carmen waitresses and does the bookkeeping for the restaurant, Lidia comes in each morning to do food prep, and Anna (Agostino's wife) waitresses and also does prep for the restaurant.

Now, the third generation of Crottis, including Carmen's daughter Margi and Agostino and Anna's son Giorgio are learning the way. Margi is a hostess, manages the restaurant's social media accounts and assists Carmen in bookkeeping. Giorgio waits tables and is active in the Top of Broadway Community Benefit District (CBD). Margi and Giorgio are training to take over the business one day and keep Tommaso's thriving, especially in the ever changing San Francisco business climate.

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

In the time before Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano, the Cantalupo family from Naples opened the doors of Lupo's and served delicious Neapolitan classics. In 1971, the Cantalupo's gave Lupo's to Tommy "Tommaso" Chin, and he renamed the restaurant Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano. In 1973, Tommy Chin sold the restaurant to Egidio and Maria Crotti, who emigrated from Lake Como, Italy, just a few years prior. Egidio and Maria, alongside their children, maintained the restaurant name, as well as 90% of the menu that now own and operate the restaurant. In the early 2000s, Carmen and Agostino Crotti took over full ownership of the restaurant.

**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.**

N/A

**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 building that houses Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano is listed as a Category A property under the California Environmental Quality Act, and is a contributing property to the Jackson Square Historic District Extension.

## **CRITERION 2**

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

Tommaso's, with its pre-history as Lupo's, is the oldest Italian restaurant in North Beach and has stayed in the same location all these years. This is in part to the role that the restaurant has played in North Beach. Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano has been a staple in North Beach through many generations, and is often referenced as an "institution." As an Italian eatery, the Neapolitan home-style cooking made the Italian immigrant community of North Beach feel like they were in a local trattoria back home with the fresh ingredients, true Neapolitan recipes and delicious assortment of wine. The oven is reminiscent of those used in Naples and throughout Italy and has historical significance that draws people in to experience what makes food baked in the oak wood-fired brick oven so special.

It is hard pressed to find someone from the neighborhood, or even San Francisco, who hasn't heard or been a patron at Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano. The restaurant, and Lupo's before it, acted as a local watering hole for the people of North Beach where people can see familiar faces and enjoy a nice meal. The patrons aren't limited to just people from the neighborhood, but also San Franciscans at large, celebrities, politicians and tourists visiting from all over the world. The old school, no frills food is hard to forget, and people from all over come to Tommaso's to experience a piece of North Beach history.

Also, the Crotti family is very much part of the fabric of the North Beach community. They have worked in the neighborhood for decades, not just at Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano but other places such as Caffè Trieste and Caesar's Italian Restaurant, and they have good relationships with businesses and people around the neighborhood.

However, it is important to note that North Beach isn't exactly what it used to be. The neighborhood has changed over the years, and many beloved businesses have moved or closed their doors. Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano is one of the only businesses to stay the same, and prosper through the changes happening in the neighborhood and San Francisco as a whole.

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

Tommaso's is not listed as a landmark, but it is home to the oldest wood-fired brick oven on the West Coast, and it has been referenced in many articles and publications as such. The brick oven even inspired notable chefs such as Alice Waters, who replicated Tommaso's oven in her restaurant Chez Panisse in Berkeley, CA. Alice later gave the design for the oven to Spago in Los Angeles, which is the flagship restaurant of the Wolfgang Puck Fine Dining Group.

If you consider Tommaso's pre-history as Lupo's, which opened in 1935, it has the distinction of being the oldest Italian restaurant in North Beach.

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

Tommaso's is referenced in many publications including but not limited to: San Francisco Chronicle, Newsweek, People Magazine, Pizza Magazine, Hoodline, Trip Advisor, Thrillist, Zagat, Restaurant News, SFist, North Beach Now, San Francisco Magazine, San Francisco Focus, Wine Spectator, Boston Globe, Gourmet, and The Independent.

In October 2005, Tommaso's received a certificate of honor from the Board of Supervisors in celebration of the service and commitment to the San Francisco community.

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

Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano has been frequented by many well-known people. In the past, the likes of Bob Hope, Frank Sinatra and Julia Child were customers. It was common in the 1970s and 80s to see Francis Ford Coppola making his own pizza! Herb Caen regularly wrote about Tommaso's and the Crotti family in his famous column in the San Francisco Chronicle.

Other notable people that have enjoyed a meal at Tommaso's include Boz Scaggs, Paul Rudd, Clive Owen, Nicole Kidman, Mayor Willie Brown, Robert Duvall, George Lucas, Sharon Stone, Penelope Cruz, Rob Lowe, Robin Williams, etc.

Even today you can see Governor Jerry Brown, Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Supervisor Aaron Peskin, directors Francis Ford Coppola and Phil Kaufman, and actor Nicholas Cage sitting in the booths that line the restaurant dining with family and friends.



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

Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano regularly donates pizza and other goods to North Beach Citizens, a non-profit that aids the homeless and low-income residents of North Beach, as well as other neighborhood organizations.

Carmen Crotti, co-owner of Tommaso's, is on the board of directors of the Top of Broadway CBD, and Giorgio Crotti, son of Agostino, regularly attends committee meetings.

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

Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano serves all types of patrons. The restaurant has always been a local eatery for the citizens of North Beach – a place where you can always see other people from the neighborhood. The community also extends to families that have been frequenting Tommaso's for generations. It is not uncommon for someone who used to come as a kid, when the restaurant was named Lupo's, to enjoy a meal now with their children and grandchildren. Also, Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano is a tourist destination for those from all over the world visiting San Francisco and want to experience a true San Francisco institution.

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

Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano is the oldest Italian restaurant in North Beach considering its pre-history as Lupo's.

Tommaso's is home to the oldest wood-fired brick oven on the West Coast. The inside of the oven is lined with bricks, and it is roughly 11 feet deep and 8 feet high. The oven only uses oak wood because it yields very high heat (about 900°F) and low flame which is the best for baking pizzas and other meat and pasta dishes. The heat in the oven is so high that it only takes 3-4 minutes to bake a pizza. It takes longer to stretch and assemble a pizza than it does to bake it.

The canvas paintings that line the restaurant were painted by a local artist. The Cantalupo family brought over post cards from their native Naples as inspiration for the paintings of the Gulf of Naples and the Amalfi Coast. The canvas paintings are still in great condition and the Crotti family hasn't had to do any restorative work on them besides dusting and the occasional cleaning.

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

There is no doubt that the North Beach community would suffer negative consequences if Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano were to close. Tommaso's, with its pre-history as Lupo's, is the oldest Italian restaurant in North Beach, a neighborhood with a rich history and strong sense of community. North Beach has changed greatly over the years, but the Crottis have maintained

much of the restaurant's class and charm consistent, making it one of the few remaining places that still has the feeling of old North Beach.

### **CRITERION 3**

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

Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano is not only a restaurant, it is an experience. San Franciscans and visitors from all over the world come to Tommaso's to enjoy the ambiance, the food and the excellent customer service. Outside, the restaurant front is painted dark green, with wood signs showing off the Tommaso's logo. The 60-seat hole-in-the-wall restaurant has a large communal table in the center surrounded by romantic booths with more privacy, all with views of the wood-fired brick oven. The dim-lit restaurant booms with the crackling energy of talk and laughter. In the back of the restaurant is a small kitchen, and beside it is the pizza station, where the famous oven resides. The smell of pizza and other dishes fill your senses you right as you walk in the front of the restaurant. The front of the house is crowded with people waiting for tables, surrounded by paintings, photos, articles and posters dedicated to the restaurant. Even though it usually loud and crowded, people always enjoy their time at Tommaso's.

#### **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 businesses historical character? (e.g., business model, goods and services, craft, culinary, or art forms)**

A major part of Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano's charm is that it has hold true to its traditions, from its opening in 1935 as Lupo's to now. It has always been a family run business, serving dishes that are reminiscent of old school Italy. The decor of the restaurant has also been the same – the oil-on-canvas paintings of the Amalfi Coast and the Gulf of Naples still line the walls of the restaurant since they were painted in 1935. The restaurant has never taken reservations, which leads to long waits for a table, but people are happy to do so while enjoying a glass of wine and the company of the other patrons.

The oak-burning oven is essential to Tommaso's, as there are no industrial ovens in the restaurant. Everything is baked in the oven, which gives the food a smoky, warm essence that sets the cuisine apart from others.

#### **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.).**

The interior and exterior of Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano has changed very little in the past 80+ years. The building's facade hasn't changed in design, and the interior lined with canvas paintings from the 1930s have remained. In the front of the restaurant are articles proclaiming

the importance of Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano and movie posters, including signed posters from The Godfather Part III, Moonstruck and Hemingway & Gellhorn. Around the restaurant, there are also renditions of Tommaso's Ristorante Italiano painted by local artists.

Most of the exterior and interior hasn't changed over the past 80+ years, and because of that the Crottis do occasional maintenance outside and inside the restaurant. About every 5 years, the Crottis repaint the exterior, and the canvases on the inside haven't needed much maintenance, just the occasional cleaning with light soap and water. The oven itself has stayed exactly the same, with all the original bricks from 1935 still in place. Every two years, the Crottis change the sand that is above the oven. This is a precautionary measure taken because if one of the bricks break off in the oven, the sand will come down and put out the fire so the fire doesn't spread up and out the oven.

**d. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30years; 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.**

N/A

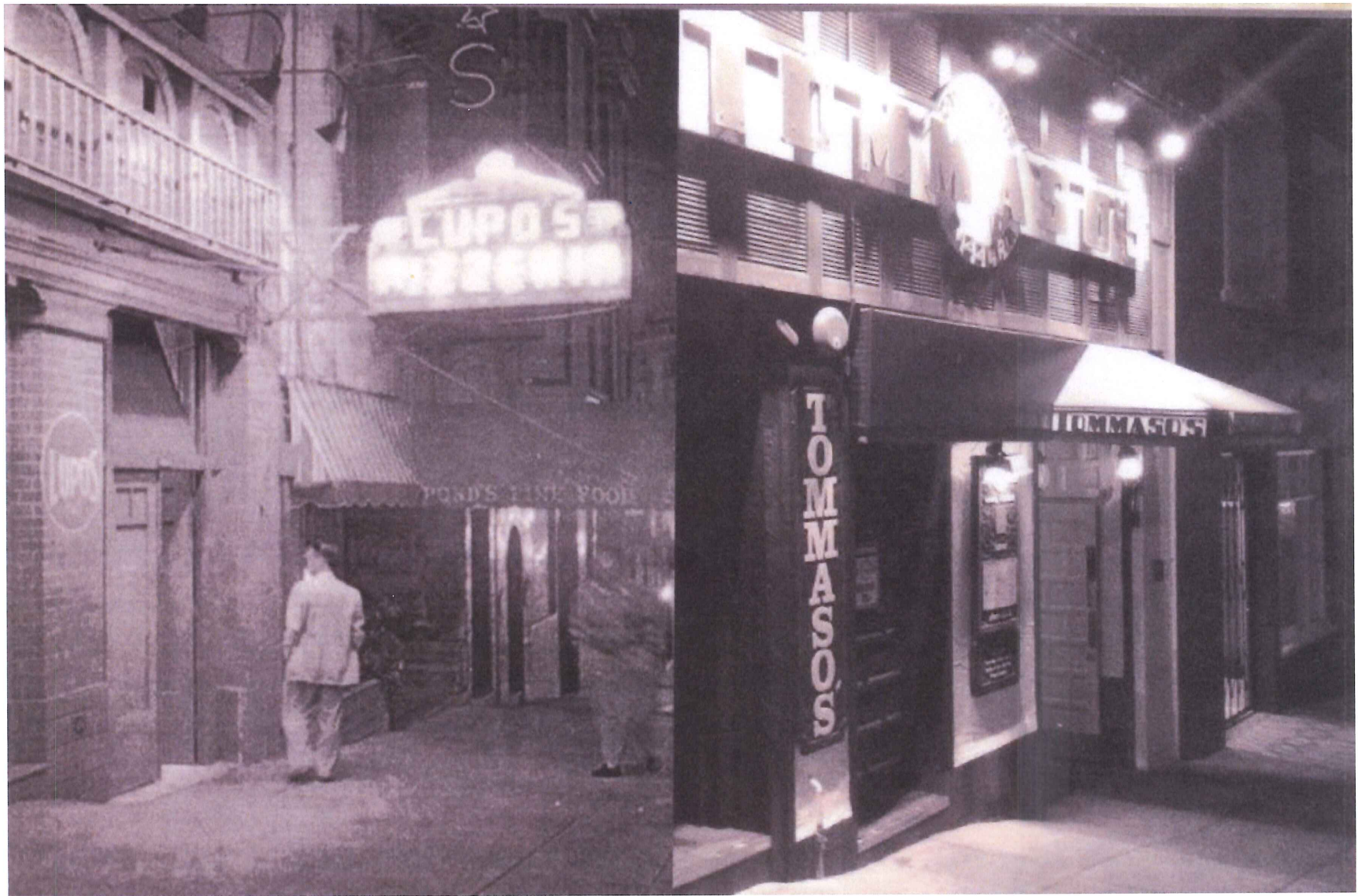


# Tommaso's

## San Francisco Business Registration Certificate

BUSINESS REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE		RENEW BY DATE	EXPIRATION DATE
BUSINESS ACCOUNT NUMBER <b>0080515</b>		<b>05-31-2018</b>	<b>06-30-2018</b>
LOCATION ID <b>0080515-01-001</b>			
TRADE NAME (DBA) <b>TOMMASO RESTAURANT</b>			
BUSINESS LOCATION <b>1042 KEARNY ST</b>			
BUSINESS <b>TOMMASOS RISTORANTE PIZZ LLC</b>		THIRD PARTY TAX COLLECTOR	
<input type="checkbox"/> PARKING TAX		<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSIENT OCCUPANCY TAX	
TOMMASOS RISTORANTE PIZZ LLC 1042 KEARNY ST SAN FRANCISCO CA 94133-4525		CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO OFFICE OF THE TREASURER & TAX COLLECTOR	
		José Cisneros Treasurer	David Augustine Tax Collector

Read reverse side. To update addresses or to close a business, go to [www.sftreasurer.org/accountupdate](http://www.sftreasurer.org/accountupdate).



Right: Lupo's in 1930's Left: Tommaso's in 2000's





Tommaso's Exterior







1042. KEARNY STREET

TOMMASO'S

TOMMASO'S

TOMMASO'S  
Menu  
Since 1985  
OPEN  
Sun-Fri 11A-10P  
Sat-Sun 11A-12P  
Dine-In/Out



RESTORANTE  
**TOMMASO'S**  
PIZZERIA

1046

**TOMMASO'S**

1042

NO SMOKING  
WITHIN  
25 ft

**TOMMASO'S**  
DAILY SPECIAL  
MENU  
since 1935

**OPEN**  
Tues - Sat 8 P.M. - 12:30  
Sundays 1 P.M. - 10 P.M.  
Closed Mondays

**TOMMASO'S**

1042. KEARNY STREET

1042

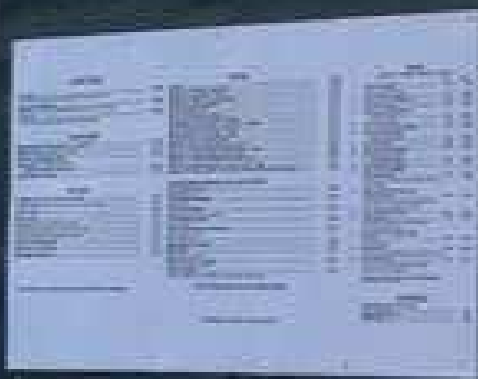


**TOMMASO'S**

monthly SPECIAL



**MENU**



**since 1935.**

**OPEN**

Tues.-Sat 5 P.M.-10:30

Sunday 4 P.M.-9:30 P.M.

Closed Mondays

This is the site of Lupo's  
Restaurant which introduced  
Pizza to the West coast in 1935.

The original brick oven,  
fired by oak-wood, is still  
in use here at Tommaso's.





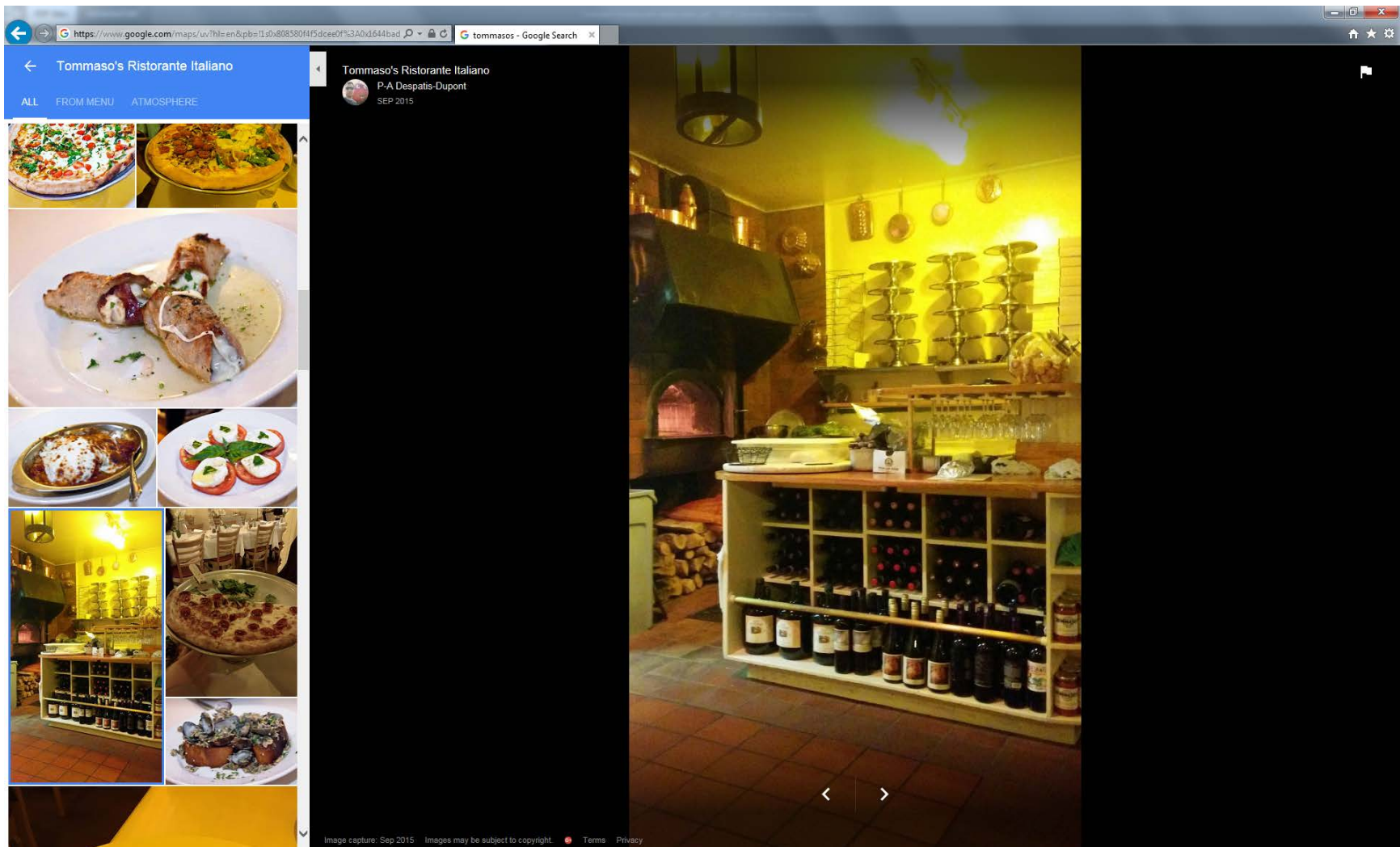
Tommaso's during business hours















The original wood-fired brick oven



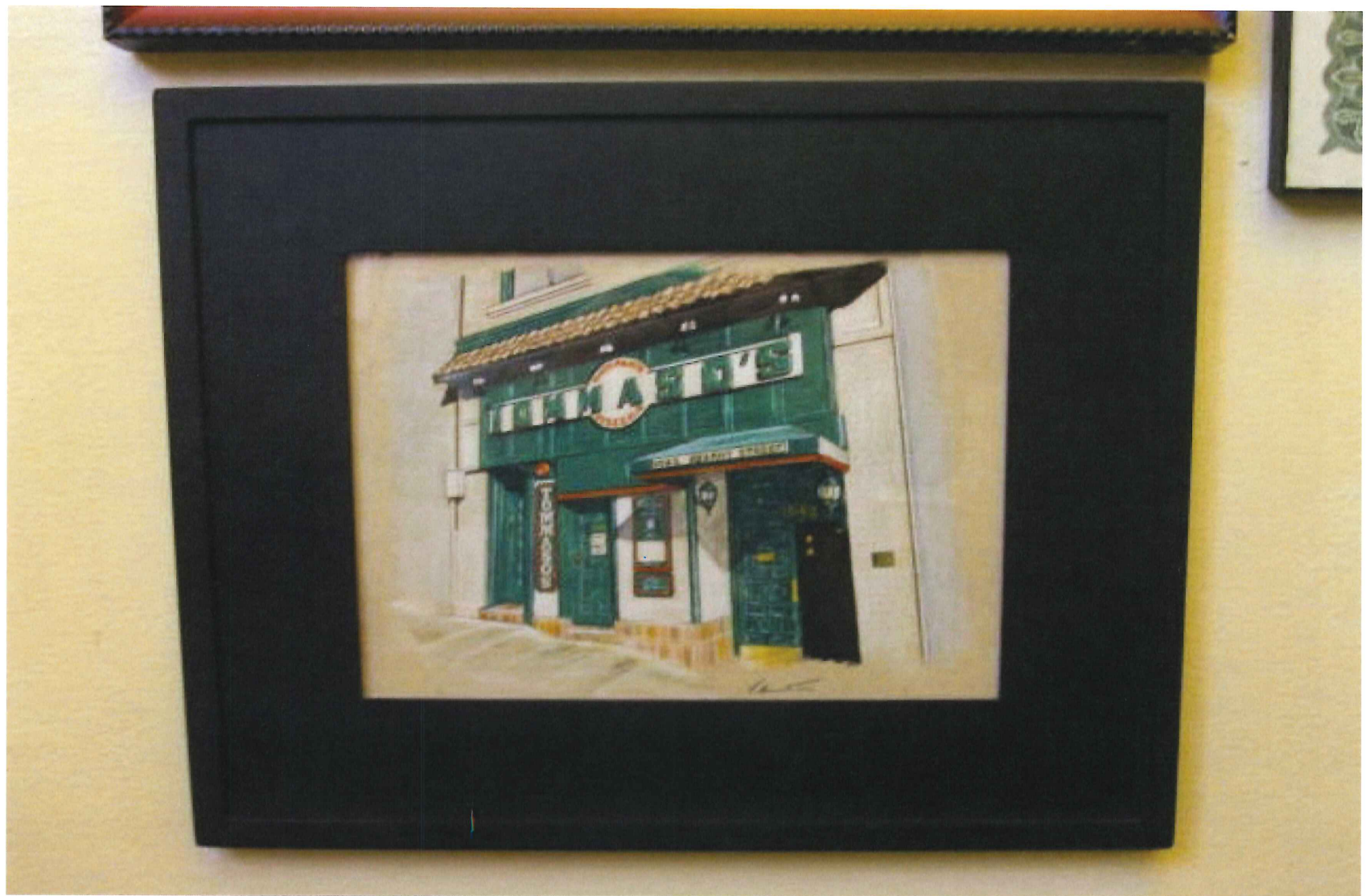




## Examples of Posters and Artwork in Tommaso's

From left to right: "Moonstruck" signed by Nick Cage, "Tommaso's" painted by Mary Lipian, "Godfather III" signed by Francis Ford Coppola



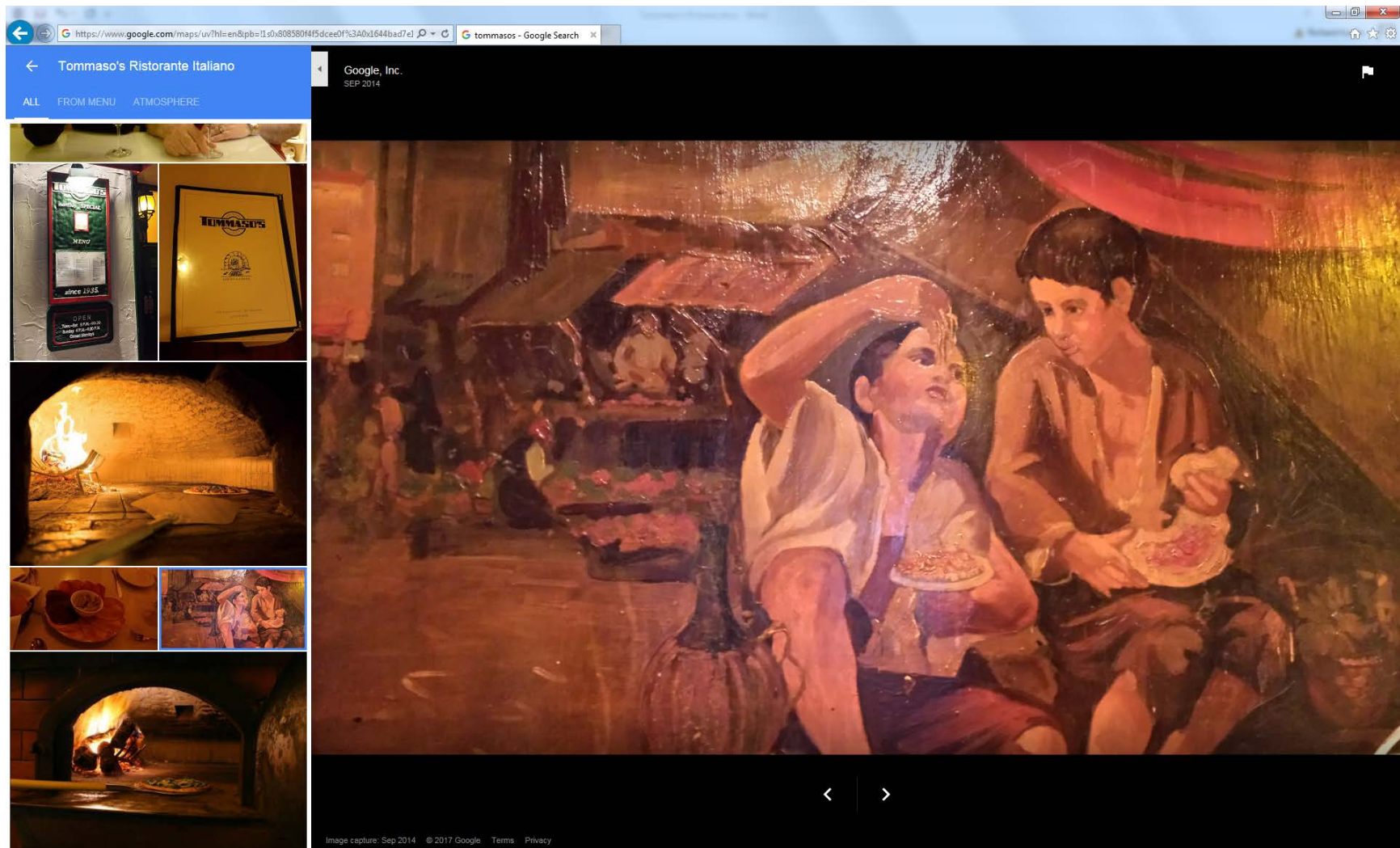


Artist sketch of Tommaso's



Signed Chronicle Article by the SF Giants









Agostino Crotti and Carmen Crotti



The Crotti Family  
Lidia, Carmen, Agostino, and Anna

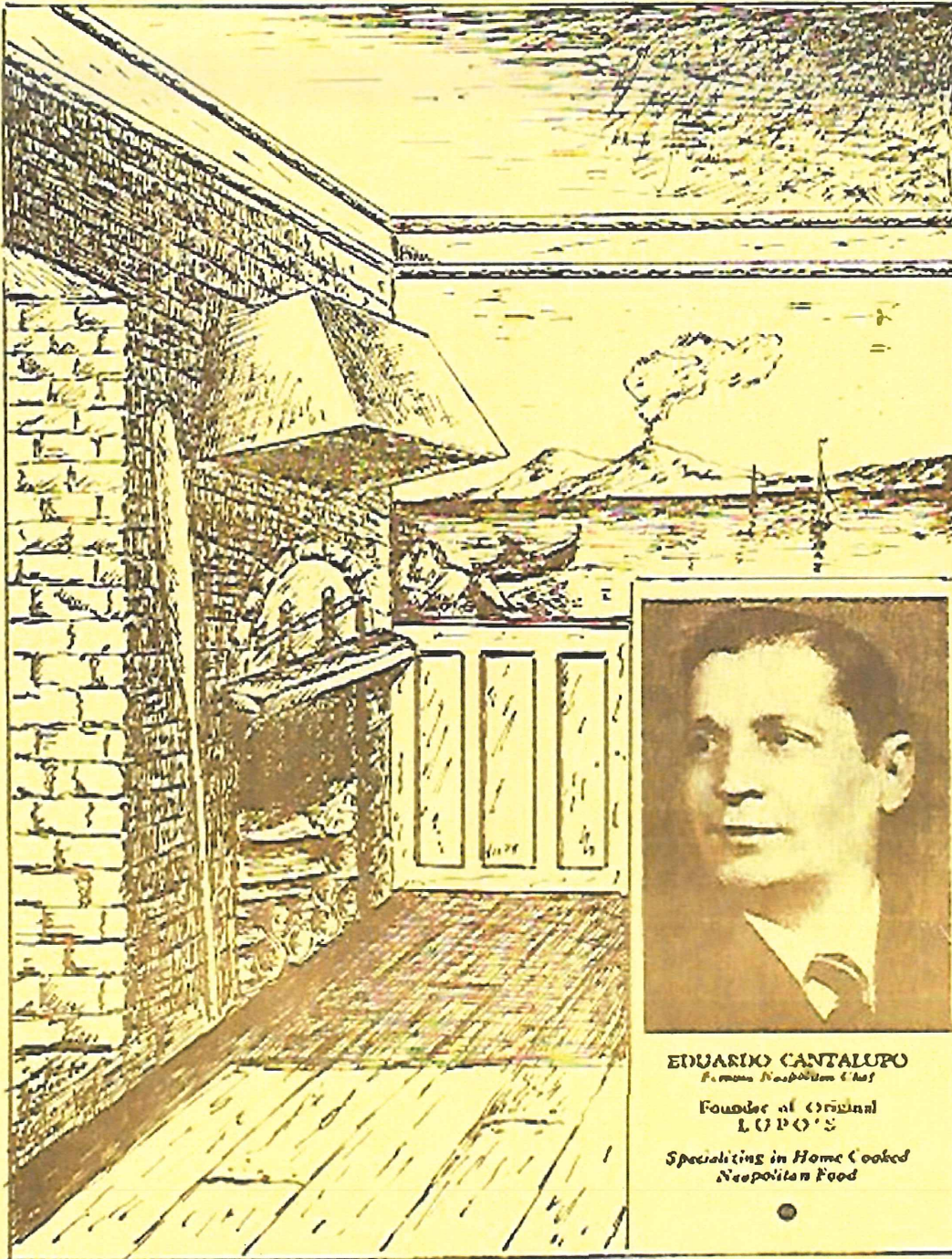


# LUPO'S FAMOUS PIZZERIA

AND  
NEAPOLITAN RESTAURANT

1042 KEARNY STREET

SAN FRANCISCO



**EDUARDO CANTALUPO**

*Former Neapolitan Chef*

Founder of Original  
LUPO'S

*Specializing in Home Cooked  
Neapolitan Food*

Lupo's Menu in the 1950's



## PIZZA

### TE PRICE AND SIZE OF PIZZA DESIRED

ARE PRICED ACCORDING TO THE QUANTITY OF IN-  
DESIRED. ALL PIZZAS ARE PREPARED WITH TOMATO  
SAUCE UNLESS OTHERWISE SPECIFIED.

#### Small

Neapolitan	.75	1.50	2.00
(with Sauce)			
Anchovies	.75	1.50	2.00
(with Sauce and Olive Oil)			
Mushrooms	.75	1.50	2.00
(with Sauce and Olive Oil)			
Half Special	.85	2.00	
Anchovies with Cheese, Tomato			
(Oil)			
Grilled	.75	2.00	
(Tomato Sauce and Olive Oil)			
Lam, Mushrooms and			
Mixed	1.25	2.25	
(with Olive Oil)			
Cheese and Anchovies			
(with Olive Oil)	1.50	2.50	
Chicken (Mixed)	1.50	2.50	
(with Cheese, Chicken, Olive Oil, Ham)			
Peppers	1.50	2.50	
(with Cheese, Capers, Anchovies, Tomato)			
Half (Deluxe)	1.75	3.00	
(with Cheese, Anchovies, Olives, Olive			
Oil, Half Mushrooms, Ham,			
and Tomato Sauce)			
Cheese and Mushrooms			
(with Tomato Sauce)	1.50	2.50	
Mushrooms and Cheese			
Anchovies	1.50	2.50	
(with Olive Oil)			
Italian Sausage and			
Peppers	1.50	2.50	
(with Olive Oil)			
Peppers and Cheese			
(with Olive Oil)	1.50	2.50	
Mushrooms or An-			
Half Italian Sausage			
(with Olive Oil)	1.50	2.50	
Sauce	1.50	2.50	
(with Sweet Italian Basil, Garlic)			
Mushrooms and An-			
chovies and Half Cheese	1.50	2.50	
(with Olive Oil)			
Cheese Mixed	1.50	2.50	
Half (Super Deluxe)	2.00	4.00	
(with Cheese, Anchovies, Olives, Olive			
Oil, Half Ham, Cheese, Chicken,			
Sweet Basil, Garlic, Tomato			

## SPAGHETTI

Imported Italian Antipasto (served with olive oil and wine vinegar)	1.25
Spaghetti with Meat Sauce	.75
Spaghetti a la Neapolitan with Meat Balls and Cheese	
Spaghetti with Italian Sausage	1.50
Spaghetti with Butter and Cheese	1.00
Spaghetti Caruso, Platter	1.25
Spaghetti (in bianco) with Anchovy Sauce	1.25
Spaghetti with Olive Oil, Garlic and Parsley	1.00
Spaghetti with Clams—Red or White Sauce	1.25
Spaghetti with Sauce Filet (SPECIAL)	1.50
Half Spaghetti and Half Ravioli	.90
Half Spaghetti, Half Ravioli with Meat Balls	1.50
Spaghetti Marinara Sauce	.90

### ALL SPAGHETTI COOKED TO ORDER 25c Extra

Home Made "Lasagna" (When Available)	1.00
Ravioli Home Made	.75
Ravioli with Meat Balls	1.25

### LUPO'S OVEN BAKED SPECIALTIES AND ENTREES

Canape of Mozzarella and Filet of Anchovies	.75
Baked Macaroni with Sauce and Cheese	.75
Baked Macaroni with Melted Cheese	1.25
Baked Macaroni with Meat Balls	1.50
Baked Macaroni with Melted Cheese and Egg Plant	1.75
Veal Saute with Fresh Peppers and Mushrooms	1.25
Veal Scaloppine Pizzaiuolo	1.25
Veal Scaloppine Cacciatora with Fresh Peppers and Mushrooms	1.50
Scaloppine Pizzaiuolo, Mushrooms	1.50
Veal Scaloppine Marsala	1.50
Veal Scaloppine Fiorentina	1.50
Veal Scaloppine Picante	1.50
Veal Scaloppine Sorrento (a la Parmigiana Style)	1.50
Veal Kidney—A Lupo Specialty	1.50
Stuffed Veal Rolletini—Broiled	2.50

Fried Chicken	1.50
Chicken a la Cacciatora	1.60
Chicken Lupo	1.75
Italian Sausage with Vegetable and Salad	1.50
Home Made Meatball with Vegetables	.75
Sauteed Peppers with Capers & Imported Olives & Olive Oil	.75
Baked Egg Plant with Parmigiana	.75
Baked Egg Plant Mushroom Style	.75
Baked Egg Plant Barcarole	.75 and 1.00

NO SERVICE LESS THAN 50c PER PERSON  
PRICES SUBJECT TO MARKET CHANGES

## SEA FOOD SPECIALTIES (When Available)

Baked Filet of Sole	
Baked Deviled Crab	
Baked Marinated Oysters	
Baked Halibut	
Baked Sea Bass	
Baked Fresh Clams, Vinaigrette Sauce	
Clams on French Toast (Red or White Sauce)	
Calamari (Squids) Saute a la Lucien	
Calamari (Squids) Fried in Olive Oil	
Shrimps a la Lupo	

### SALADS (When Available or in Season)

Broccoli, Chilled, with Olive Oil and Lemon	
Chilled String Beans with Olive Oil and Lemon	
Toasted Peppers with Olive Oil and Lemon	
Combination Vegetable	
Zucchini — Vinaigrette	
Fresh Asparagus Vinaigrette	
Fresh Asparagus Au Gratin	
Cauliflower and Mint — Vinaigrette	
Spinach—Lemon, Olive Oil and Garlic	
Lettuce and Tomatoes	

## DESSERTS

Baba au Rum	
Canoli — Home Made — Different	
Zabaglione (Imported Marsala)	
Camembert Cheese	
French Pastry	

## BEVERAGES

Milk	Sm. 10c	Large
Coffee		
Italian Roast Coffee (per pot)		
Coca Cola		

## WINE LIST DOMESTIC

	LARGE	SMALL
Monte Carlo Red or White	1.50	
Asti Wines	2.00	
Almaden Red or White	2.00	
L. Martini Red or White	2.00	
Beaulieu Signature Red or White	2.00	
Italian Swiss Colony	2.00	

### IMPORTED

Bertolli Chianti (Straw Flask)	3.00	
Gancia Grignolino	2.50	
Champagne	8.00	
Wine by Glass	.35	Local Beer .25 Eastern Beer

"All Prices Are Our OPS Ceiling Prices or Lower. A List Showing Our Ceiling Price For Each Item Is Available For Your Inspection."

foods are cooked to your individual order, we ask your indulgence  
take longer in serving you than in the ordinary restaurant.

The Management assumes no responsibility whatsoever for lost articles, also reserves the

to refuse service to anyone without assigning a reason therefor.



# WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT LUPO'S

"For the best Italian Food visit Lupo's in San Francisco."

DIXON HART (*Liberty Magazine*)

"To Lupo who makes my Stomach Laugh."

NOS HOPE

"Pizza out of this World."

FORD TIME MAGAZINE

J. Colonna says "When in San Francisco I go to my friend Lupo."

"The Greatest Food on Earth."

BETTY HUTTON

"But don't miss the incomparable Pizza at Lupo's."

PAY DIRT MAGAZINE

"Lupo's is a spot transplanted out of the heart of Naples."

THE ATLANTIC

"You'll thoroughly enjoy the evening."

DUNCAN MINES (*"Adventurer in Good Eating"*)

"Not even in its native habitat, did I enjoy Neapolitan food more—thanks to the skill of Chef Eduardo Cantalupo."

BRUNO LESSING (*International Columnist*)

"Lupo's—where true Neapolitan food can be had and delightful, too!"

MARSHALL MASLIN (*S. F. Call Bulletin*)

"At Lupo's food which you can taste nowhere else in San Francisco, where you revel in the unusual, as to atmosphere and serving."

RUTH THOMPSON (*S. F. News*)

"Lupo's, serving a dish that should win for this city a place in the GOURMAND'S Hall of Fame—The Pizzal"

IVAN PAUL (*S. F. Examiner*)

"At Lupo's, where the Pizza makes your heart sing."

HERB CAEN (*Baghdad by the Bay*)

"I've eaten Pizza all over the world, but Lupo's is the best."

AL WILLIAMS (*Papagayo Room*)

"Tried Pizza in Naples, the 'Home of Pizza,' and I like yours better."

HAROLD ZELLENBACH (*Crown Zellerbach*)

"If you enjoy watching an artist handle his materials with skill and devotion, Lupo's is the spot for Real Neapolitan Pizza."

GOURMET GUIDE (*S. F. Chronicle*)

"San Francisco has the best food in the country, and Lupo's the best in San Francisco."

VELOZ AND YOLANDA

"Lasagna as prepared at Lupo's is a masterpiece."

AMERICAN WEEKLY

Jack Webb says "When in San Francisco Lupo's is my home."

**LUPO'S**

RESTAURANT

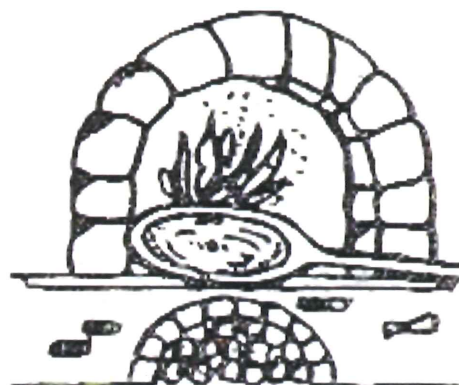
1042 KEARNY

SAN FRANCISCO

CALIFORNIA

STAMP

CORRESPONDENCE



FORNO A LEGNA

1042 Kearny Street • San Francisco

415-398 9696



## STARTERS

Antipasto .....	18.00
<i>(Prosciutto, rosemary ham, bresaola and artichoke hearts)</i>	
Vegetarian Antipasto .....	17.00
<i>(Selection of fresh vegetables marinated in olive oil and lemon)</i>	
Carpaccio .....	16.00
<i>(Thinly sliced beef with capers, onion, and parmesan)</i>	
Baked Fresh Coo-Coo Clams (A Specialty) .....	16.00
Fried Calamari .....	16.50

## SALADS & MARINATED VEGETABLES

Caprese <i>(Tomato, Fresh Mozzarella and Basil)</i> .....	11.00
Spinach Salad <i>(Cherry tomato, parmesan cheese and nuts)</i> .....	10.50
Caesar Salad.....	10.50
Dinner Salad.....	6.00
Chilled Broccoli w/ Olive Oil, Lemon .....	7.75
Chilled String Beans w/ Olive Oil, Lemon .....	7.75
Toasted Peppers w/ Olive Oil, Lemon .....	7.75
Zucchini a la Vinaigrette .....	7.75
Asparagus Vinaigrette .....	7.75

**Visa, Mastercard, American Express, and Discover Accepted**

## PASTAS

Lasagna .....	17.50
Stuffed Manicotti (Homemade) w/ Marinara .....	16.50
<i>With Meatballs or Sausage.....</i>	18.00
Ravioli (Meat or Cheese) w/Marinara, Meat Sauce or Pesto .....	16.50
<i>With Meat Balls or Sausage .....</i>	18.00
Spaghetti w/ Marinara or Meat Sauce .....	14.00
<i>With Meatballs or Sausage.....</i>	15.50
Spaghetti w/ Olive Oil, Garlic, Parsley & Chili Flakes .....	15.00
<i>With Broccoli.....</i>	16.00
Penne alla Vodka (creamy tomato sauce and pancetta).....	19.00
Penne alla Boscaiola (porcini mushrooms and creamy meat sauce).....	18.00
Fettuccine with Clams (Red or White Sauce).....	19.00
Fettuccine with Prawns Marinara or Alfredo Sauce.....	19.00
Fettuccine Tutto Mare w/Prawns, Scallops, Clams, Fresh Tomatoes, Basil, ... Garlic & Chili Flakes	21.50

## ENTREES

Veal Saltimbocca .....	26.00
<i>(Prosciutto, Fresh Mozzarella in a White Wine Sauce)</i>	
Veal Parmigiana .....	25.00
Veal Rollettini .....	26.00
<i>(Veal, Stuffed w/ Prosciutto and Cheese then Baked)</i>	
Veal Piccante .....	25.00
<i>(Lemon &amp; Capers)</i>	
Baked Eggplant Parmigiana .....	17.50
Baked Chicken .....	19.00
<i>(With garlic and rosemary)</i>	
Chicken Parmigiana .....	18.00
Fish of the Day.....	26.00

*(Veal and Chicken dishes served with a side of Penne Marinara)*

•WE RESERVE THE RIGHT TO REFUSE SERVICE•



## PIZZAS

(Small Pizza = 12 Inches • Large Pizza = 15 Inches)

		Small	Large
1.	Margherita ..... (Cheese, tomato sauce and basil)	19.00	24.00
2.	Sliced Meatballs.....	21.00	26.00
3.	Ham and Mushrooms.....	22.00	27.00
4.	Arugula and Shaved Parmesan	23.00	29.00
5.	Chicken Breast and Artichoke Hearts .....	22.00	27.00
6.	Burrata, Cherry Tomatoes and Basil.....	23.00	29.00
7.	Sliced Italian Sausage .....	21.00	26.00
8.	Fresh Spinach and Shaved Parmesan.....	23.00	29.00
9.	Salame.....	21.00	26.00
10.	Parma Prosciutto .....	23.00	29.00
11.	Mushrooms and Sliced Italian Sausage .....	22.00	27.00
12.	Italian Pepperoni.....	21.00	26.00
13.	Calzone Imbottito..... (Folded pizza with ricotta and mozzarella cheeses, & prosciutto ham)	24.00	30.00
14.	Calzone with Mushrooms. Sausage and Sauce .....	24.00	30.00
	(Folded pizza with ricotta and mozzarella cheeses, tomato sauce, sausage and mushrooms)		
15.	Clams and Garlic.....	22.00	27.00
16.	Vegetarian..... (Bell pepper, green onions, mushrooms, garlic, and olives)	22.00	27.00
17.	Carbonara..... (White pizza with bacon, caramelized onions, Parmesan and egg,	24.00	30.00
18.	Seafood..... (Sea scallops, clams, tiger prawns and chopped tomatoes)	24.00	30.00
19.	Super Deluxe..... (Mushrooms, anchovies, peppers, green onions, ham, sausage and black olives)	24.00	30.00

All pizzas are made with tomato sauce and mozzarella cheese  
Extra items are \$2.00 more

## BEVERAGES

Decaf, Coffee, Milk, Tea (hot or iced)	
Coke, 7-Up, Diet Coke, Limonata and Aranciata .....	3.00
Sparkling Water, 1/2 Liter .....	3.50
Sparkling Water, Liter .....	6.00

## Wine List

### Aperitivi

Prosecco-Italian sparkling white wine - dry & crisp \$9.00/flute

Moscato D'Asti- Italian sparkling sweet and fruity white wine \$9.50/flute

## **Hump Day Special!**

**1/2 off Bottles of Wine on Wednesdays**

### Red Wine

	<u>Glass</u>	<u>Bottle</u>
TOMMASO PRIVATE LABEL RED BLEND- 2014 Sonoma County	10.00	38.00
<i>A blend of Zinfandel, Merlot and Syrah produced exclusively for Tommaso's by Pedroncelli Vineyards</i>		
CHIANTI CLASSICO-2013 Le Bocce-Gallo Nero	10.00	38.00
CHIANTI-2013 Villa Claudia D.O.C.G. 375ml	1/2 Bottle	19.50
PRIMITIVIO-2016 Rocca, Salento		39.00
SANGIOVESE 2015 Celli, Romagna	10.00	38.00
SANGIOVESE di TOSCANA 2012 Sassaia di Albereto		45.00
VALPOLICELLA-Ripasso 2013 Cesari (Baby Amarone)	12.00	45.00
PINOT NOIR-2015 Hahn, Santa Lucia Highlands	12.00	45.00
ZINFANDEL-2015 Dry Creek, Sonoma County	11.00	42.00
MERLOT-2013 Folie à Deux, Alexander Valley	12.00	45.00
CABERNET SAUVIGNON-2015 B.R. Cohn, North Coast	13.50	55.00
BOTONERO 2015 (Nebbiolo Grape) Prevostini Lombardia	10.50	40.00
<i>From our family's estate winery in Valtellina, one of Italy's award winning winemakers Mamete Prevostini</i>		

### Cellar Selections

MONTAGE-2012 Scaggs Vineyard Mount Veeder Napa Valley	75.00
CABERNET BLEND-2011 Francis Ford Coppola Cinema Gold Label	55.00
CHIANTI RUFINA RISERVA-2013 Nipozzano	49.00
AMARONE-2012 Cesari	75.00
BAROLO-2010 Stefano Farina	60.00
BRUNELLO di MONTALCINO-2011 Poggio Della Badia	85.00
SANGIOVESE-2014 Del Dotto Vineyards, Napa Valley	65.00
CABERNET SAUVIGNON-2013 Grace Family Vineyards Blank Vineyards	225.00
CABERNET SAUVIGNON-2013 Grace Family Vineyards Napa Valley	249.00
CORTE di CAMA-2013 Prevostini-Lombardia D.O.C.G.	79.00
<i>This 100% Nebbiolo is hand crafted by our family in Valtellina-Northern Italy</i>	

### White and Sparklers

WHITE ZINFANDEL-2015 Fetzer Vinyards, California	7.50	25.00
SAUVIGNON BLANC-2016 Paradise Ridge, Russian River	10.00	38.00
PINOT GRIGIO-2016 Zenato Delle Venezie	10.00	38.00
CHARDONNAY-2015 Shannon Ridge, Lake County	10.00	38.00
ASTI SPUMANTE-Martini and Rossi 1/2 bottle	15.00	30.00
PROSECCO-Metico, Veneto	9.00	40.00
BRUT-Roederer Estates, Anderson Valley		45.00
PORT-2000 Dow-Late Bottle Vintage	8.50	

### Beer

Budweiser, Bud Light, & Clausthaler (non alcoholic)	5.50
IMPORTED & PREMIUM-Moretti, Moretti Red,	6.00
Peroni, Anchor Steam	
***Corkage Fee-\$15 per bottle, 2 bottle limit per party***	

### House Wine

Red or White-San Antonio  
California Blend

\$7.00 Glass \$16 1/2 Liter \$25 Liter



## PRESS AND REVIEWS

### Join Us as we Celebrate Over 80 Years in San Francisco's North Beach!

On September 21, 2015, Tommaso's, the legendary North Beach restaurant, kicked off it's 80th year of family tradition with an intimate family dinner between the current and original owners, The Crotti and Cantalupo families to celebrate the 80th Anniversary of Tommaso's Restaurant. The Crotti family hosted the Cantalupo family to honor the legacy that their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents began on Kearny Street so many years ago.



### Recent Articles

Select a link from below to read the full article.

- [25 Best Italian Restaurants in San Francisco](#). Dream Vacation Magazine - April 25, 2017
- [Best Ravioli In San Francisco, CBS SF Bay Area](#) - March 20, 2017
- [Happy National Pizza Day! Celebrate with the best pizza in the Bay Area, SF Gate](#) - February 9, 2017
- [Tommaso's Celebrates 80 Years In North Beach, Hoodline](#) - Oct 27, 2015

- [Tommaso's Restaurant Celebrates 80 Years in San Francisco, San Francisco, RestaurantNews.com](#) - Oct 14, 2015
- [Tommaso's is model of neighborly grace, San Francisco Chronicle](#) - Mar 22, 2015
- [Tommaso's: On "Trendy" Burrata, Owning a Legacy, Eater SF](#) - May 11, 2012



### CityGuide – Tommaso's Restaurant

"Tommaso's is a North Beach institution – people in the know have been coming here since 1935. Crunchy crusted pizzas from an old-world oakwood-burning oven are the piece de resistance. Try the unusual Calzone Imbottito, a pizza turnover stuffed with ricotta, mozzarella, prosciutto and spices; or any of the pizzas. I particularly like the one topped with Tommaso's homemade sausage and mushrooms."

"Just as delicious, though, are Tommaso's pastas. This is one of the few places in town to serve one of my old favorites, manicotti; wide hollow pasta tubes filled with ricotta and spices, smothered in a rich tomato sauce. Whatever else you order, don't miss the Coo-Coo Clams soaked in oil and vinegar and baked in the oven."

"For dessert, there's often house made tiramisu, combining rum, ladyfingers, mascarpone and chocolate; or do as the Italians do and order the biscotti, served with a dessert wine for

dipping. The small, cave-like dining room fills up nightly and reservations are not accepted, so it's best to arrive early. The prized tables are the ones along the side walls (with wood partitions between them making for booth-like coziness). Service is swift and efficient. Tommaso's rustic Neapolitan specialties are also available for take-out."

On September 21, 2015, Tommaso's, the legendary North Beach restaurant, kicked off its 80th year of family tradition with an intimate family dinner between the current and original owners, The Crotti and Cantalupo families to celebrate the 80th Anniversary of Tommaso's Restaurant. The Crotti family hosted the Cantalupo family to honor the legacy that their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents began on Kearny Street so many years ago.

### **sfweekly.com - Best Pizza (2004)**

"It makes us happy that the oldest wood-fired brick oven in San Francisco (built in 1935, when Tommaso's opened as Lupo's, and reportedly the first such oven on the West Coast) turns out the best pizza crust in San Francisco: puffy, crispy, faintly smoky."

"Whether you prefer toppings of Italian sausage, clams with garlic, meatballs, scallops, tiger prawns, or clams in the shell, this is the crust you want under them. We love the room, too, with creamy-painted wooden booths that remind us more of a '30s-vintage tea room than a pizzeria, despite the charming murals of Italy."

"Tommaso's (owned by the Cotti family since 1973) has the gastronomic imprimatur of both Francis Ford Coppola, who used to make his own pizzas here before he opened his Cafe Niebaum-Coppola right down the street, and Alice Waters, who famously based her Chez Panisse wood-burning pizza oven on this one. The crunchy crust at the venerable Tommaso's still delights us."

### **Schmap San Francisco Guide**

"Claimed to be the oldest pizza restaurant on the West Coast, this North Beach icon has been serving critically acclaimed pies since the 30s. It serves a variety of styles and cook the pies the old-fashioned way in a wood-burning fire."

The atmosphere is also somewhat old-fashioned, but in a cozy and welcoming way. Unique pizza combinations include meatballs, seafood topped with scallops, baby clams and prawns, and a calzone-like turnover style with sausage and mushrooms. Also on the menu are antipasto, seafood, veal and traditional pasta dishes such as Spaghetti in Marinara Sauce and Cheese Ravioli in Pesto."



## The Rough Guide

"Just like Tosca's, Vesuvio's, Speck's, Mario's and City Lights, Tommaso's has never changed much and never will."

"As much a part of North Beach as its bars and Beat myths, Tommaso's is an authentic landmark where families come to feed together at the same trough. Celebrities haunt it too – the story goes that Francis Ford Coppola insisted on making his own pizza here. The Crotti family has run this restaurant since 1973, using the same pizza oven that their predecessors, the Lupos, brought with them from the Old Country when they opened in 1935, and that oven has lost none of its much patina-ed tang."

There's usually a short wait at the bottom of the stairs, and the earlier you come the better, they say. There's nothing out-of-the-way about the food. It's all honest and always the same, and that's its charm. Unfussy, no-nonsense pizzas with a score of toppings, spaghetti, lasagna, and scaloppini are served in a cellar with kitschy little wall murals, tablecloths, and cozy booths. Wood-fired pizza began here at Tommaso's long before it was chic and upscale, so you'll find it dependable. Crusts are thin and toppings classical: there's mozzarella and tomato, mushroom, pepperoni, and variations of several cheeses (\$14.50-25.00)."

"Ask for their antipasto plate of marinated roast red peppers (\$7.25) fresh from the oven; otherwise it's asparagus, broccoli, or beans as fresh roasted vegetables is a seasonal specialty. Try the "coo-coo" clams (\$14.50), very simply presented with oil, spices, balsamic, and a punch of oregano. The rest of the menu is just plain, reassuring comfort food, from the spaghetti and meatballs (\$14.50) to the veal parmegiana (\$19.50), mushroom-stuffed calzone (\$20.50-26.00) and manicotti in marinara (\$15.00). There's a short but useful wine list of hearty California Zins plus any number of gulpable native Italian Chiantis, Barberis, San Gieveses and dolcettos that might take your fancy. Dolci include tiramisu, cheesecake, cannoli and spamone."

"After you've sacrificed your warm spot to the next horde of regulars, get back onto your feet and stroll out along Broadway and Columbus to walk off that pasta and find a nice café for a nightcap. Wherever you look there's temptation!"

# Robert Finigan's

## Private Guide to Restaurants

WHEN ANCIENT ROMANS ATE 'BREAD WITH RELISH' for breakfast, they hardly knew what they were starting. Rough country bread baked in thin sheets with a raised outer crust was easy to hold and quick to eat. As the Romans traveled, so did this primitive pizza; the 'tomato bread' beloved of the Catalans in northern Spain is a direct descendant, as is the more elaborate Provencal tomato-onion-anchovy tart called 'pissaladiere'. But even the most enterprising of Romans could never have conceived of the extent to which this humble invention would become Big Business. Needless to say, pizza palazzi dot the American landscape in check-to-jowl intimacy with burger joints and taco stands. Inevitably, most mass-marketed pizza is terrible, mostly because of unskilled, uninterested labor and convenience-food raw materials. But as with any culinary specialty more abused than honored, pizza does have its scrupulous producers. Where they exist, they have one trait in common -- an insistence on fresh dough, fresh sauces, fresh toppings.

**TOMMASO'S**, 1042 Kearny Street (between Pacific Avenue and Broadway), San Francisco, 398-9696. Open from 5:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday and from 4:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Sunday; closed Monday and Tuesday. BA, MC; no reservations. Beer and wine only.

When we reviewed Lupo's exactly three years ago this month, we were eerily, shockingly prophetic. We sensed a sort of Italianate Gotterdammerung about the place, as if an era were ending in an era which sorely needed its emphasis on quality and integrity. "Maybe I am imagining it, but I feel she does not anticipate being able to keep Lupo's open for many more years," I wrote of the proprietress in 1971. And surely and sadly enough, just a few months later she and her husband retired, leaving the darkened restaurant a mute monument to a vanished period of Italian dining in San Francisco. But phoenix-like, the restaurant rose again under the aegis of the Chinese chef (yes, Chinese) who had presided over the kitchen for a quarter century. But this phoenix fluttered a bit and crashed ignominiously; skills in the kitchen proved different from management skills, and when I visited the newly-fledged Tommaso's in January 1973 I fled hastily with a tableful of inedible food left behind.

A report that the restaurant had again changed hands interested me enough to warrant a scribbled 'Tommaso's' on my list of San Francisco review possibilities, but it was hardly a high-priority entry. Then one evening an East Bay candidate decided to close before the time for which it had accepted my phoned reservation...and to condense the story, I found myself at Tommaso's half an hour later at 9:15 on a Sunday evening.

The restaurant was packed -- in contrast to its sepulchral emptiness when last I visited. As a matter of fact, my companion and I waited in line for fifteen minutes or so before the apparent hostess inquired if we intended to order pizza once a table became free. Responding to my quizzical gaze, she explained that there was only one ball of dough left, but since we had waited awhile it would be saved for our pizza if we so desired. Now that is old-fashioned courtesy, far removed from the 'who gets the sweetbreads' snarl of all too many restaurant employees! Once seated in one of the just-plain-booths of this unpretentious room, I looked around again at the raffish Italianate murals and other elements of a decor which thankfully hadn't been changed a whit since the good old days of Lupo's. But over in the corner nearest the famous oak-burning oven was a new

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# HERB CAEN



## Some Days Are Like This

CAENFETTI: Jerry Brown — you remember, the Governor? — is not sore at Francis Coppola for the latter's "Apocalypse Now" video fiasco in Wisconsin that signaled the end of the Brown Presidential campaign. In fact, Jer' and Francis celebrated their birthday together at Tommaso's super pizzeria on Kearny Mon. night, after which Jerry dropped in at the historic Tosca for a cappuccino he's 42. Coppola 41) ... Sidelight: the Tosca, which closed briefly after a battle among three partners, is now owned by Giancarlo Catanzaro and his new partner, Jeanette Bali Etheredge ... As long as we're in the neighborhood, Actor Leonard (Ears) Nimoy and his manager weren't exactly kicked out of Vanessi's. It's just that the latter refused to remove his hat and complained loudly about the location of their table — "I want Leonard to be SEEN!" — so Dragomer the Mayor Dee said stiffly, "I refuse to serve you." After a long silence, Nimoy and friend departed ... Memo to myself: Nimoy plays Vincent Van Gogh's brother in "Vincent," not Vincent, you turkey.

NEVER TELL, or print religious jokes: God, it seems, asked the Pope whether the Catholic Church would ever allow priests to marry. "Not while I'm Pope," said John Paul II. Then God asked if women could ever become priests. "Not while I'm Pope," said John Paul II, "and now let me ask You a question. Will there ever be another Polish Pope?" "Not while I'm God," came the reply ... And of course you heard that there were so few worshipers in a small town that the Catholic Church and the synagogue merged. New name: Our Lady of Perpetual Guilt ... Finally and too late, Prof. Wally Goldfrank forwards an ad from the Santa Cruz Sentinel showing the Easter Special at Moseatelli's restaurant to have been "Boston Baked Shroud." To go?

AS FURTHER proof that nobody's perfect, this paper's TV log Mon. described "The Benny Goodman Story" as "A biographical film on the late, great Goodman." Not only is Benny not late, he vows to be on time for a Presbyterian Hosp. benefit (for child cancer research) at Masonic Aud. May 14. He will perform with an all local group because "the Bay Area has some wild swingers." Yesss ... The Rula Lenska Fan Club will want to know that his or her favorite whatever appears on the Merv Griffin show this Friday. I can't remember who pointed out that if she married Tom Thumb she'd be Rula Thumb and it's just as well ... The way Les Tusup hears it, the nurse at St. Mary's Hosp. who confiscated Sean Mooney's bottle of Irish whiskey could have been in trouble for cutting off his life support.

# HERB CAEN



## San Franciscoena

KNOW YOUR city No. 2183: When San Franciscans say they're "going to the beach," they usually mean Stinson, sometimes North, and almost never Ocean, a glorious resource going to waste. What a mistake was made when We let Them tear down Sutro Baths and Playland, but that is another story for another day ...

A GUY tells me he has moved back from Los Angeles after three years because "there's no North Beach down there." San Franciscans tend to take their wonders for granted, but that is an extra special part of this special city — spires of Sts. Peter & Paul shining over Washington Square, perhaps our best urban space, and old Italians invisible under their wide-brimmed hats as they spread out on the benches, talking wistfully of Lucca, Pisa and Livorno. There are astringent critics who still maintain that North Beach has been "ruined" by the Broadway nudescapes, but it hasn't turned out that way. Enrico, Vanessi's, Tommaso continue to hold the line, and anyway, what's wrong with Carol Doda? After all these years at the Condor — not far from 20 now! — she has become a landmark. So what if there is a two-drink minimum at \$6.95 a pop to catch her act? That's inflation, a phenomenon of which she is an outstanding example.

CAROL DODA. Enrico Banducci, Turk Murphy, Cyril Magnin, landmarks all. As Ray Jason puts it, "I'd rather be a landmark in San Francisco than a Hollywood star or a New York celebrity," a nice, if unconscious, reworking of Boxer Willie Britt's ancient "I'd rather be a busted lamppost in San Francisco, than the Waldorf-Astoria."

LANDMARKS. A great city is measured, in part, by them, and what city has more? Paris has its Eiffel, London Big Ben, New York the Empire State (still its most distinctive) and Los Angeles has — well, what? The La Brea Tar Pits? Difficult to reproduce on a pillow or ashtray, as well as bad for your Maud Frizons. By contrast, San Francisco has an embarrassment of bridges and other riches: besides the awesome spans, there are the cable cars, Alcatraz, the Ferry Building, Fisherman's Wharf, Coit Tower, and from more recent times, the Transamerica Pyramid, BofA's Black Rock, and the TV tower atop Mt. Sutro, pulsating redly at night like a living thing, preparing an attack on Ted Turner's cable.

STINSON BEACH on a long holiday



Tuesday, February 21, 1989

# HERB CAEN



## Down to Business

**TALK ABOUT HOMOPHOBIA!** A widely known golf pro up Napa Valley way got so angry at his mother-in-law for putting on an AIDS benefit that he beat her up (broken teeth, cuts, bruises). She has retained attorney Paul Wotman to sue him and her daughter, who also attacked her ... Awwww: When the FBI was checking out Robert Mostbacher, the new secretary of commerce, an FBI agent was dispatched to interview his ex-wife, the attractive Sandra Mostbacher, who lives here. After grilling her three times with increasingly repetitive questions, he at last hemmed, hawed and got to the point: "Would you have dinner with me?" She dedined with a slight haw but no hem ... No fear. Art Agnos may be the first mayor in local history who sends out form letters to constituents that include his home address. Isn't he afraid one of these will fall into the hands of a nut, or have they already? ... Add sightseers: Prof. Augie Coppola celebrating his 55th birthday Thursday night at Tommaso's in North Beach with a mob that included brother Francis, father Carmen, sister Talla Shire and — Jerry Brown! That man is everywhere. For the benefit of latecomers, Tommaso's still makes the best classical pizza in town — a real achievement after 50 years of distinguished heartburn.

★ ★ ★ 21-21-89

FOR SHAHRAZIAN agree with Jay Leeb



# HERB CAEN

## Dotting the Items

**BOZ SCAGGS**, our only resident superstar, and his ex-wife, the coruscating Carmella, were acting lovely-dovey in a back booth at Tommaso's Famous Pizzeria Sun. night, but I don't think it was the start of anything hotter than heartburn ... Boz, meanwhile, is ready to go into the restaurant business with a chicken joint (he's an excellent cook) next to the Balboa in the "Bermuda Triangle." The other points are the Dart — the Dartmouth Social Club — and Adolfo Veronese's Osteria Romano, which sounds like a gadget that purees Italians. Do I have to remind you that it's called the Bermuda Triangle because singles disappear there overnight? All right then ... About those rumors of bickering among the Balboa's partners: true ... And don't ask me why THIS is being kept a secret, but there'll be a "Labor Day" parade Sunday up Market to Civic Center (arriving there about 2 p.m.) for a rally led by Lane Kirkland, head of the AFL-CIO, and Ed Asner, the active activist. Maybe the news that 10 million are unemployed is finally getting through to the unions, who've been in bed with the bosses so long they're hard to tell apart.

★ ★ ★  
**DOES DETROIT** know or care that the Dept. of Gen'l Services in Sacramento just bought 98 new Toyotas? ... Despite newspaper ads, Kyra Nijinsky, dgtr of the all-time greatest ballet star, will not dance in the Exotic Erotic Ball at Brooks Hall Oct. 29-30 because "I just found out there will be nudity." I wonder what she thinks "Exotic Erotic" refers to. "I am offended. Nudity is against my religion. I will not dance. Inform your readers." Done, genteel lady ... Janet Gaynor, the one-time screenstar recovering at S.F. General from a horrendous auto crash, rec'd a birthday cake last week — she's 76 — from her 1923 classmates at Polytechnic High. This was engineered by Dr. Bert Wolfsohn (Poly '22), who dated Miss Gaynor. "Her real name," he recalls, "was Laura Gainer, and we all called her 'Lollie.' A dear dear girl, a good dancer and great fun."

★ ★ ★  
**TWO NEWLY-ARRIVED** tourists, camera-crested and cowboy-hatted, stopped Jim Douglas at Battery and Calif. and one asked, "When's the next cable car?" "About May, 1984," replied Jim. "Smartass," grumbled the auslander, stomping off ... Actually, Jim's reply isn't too far off when the cables ARE running ... The positively final item on the sex-shock-horror joke that "God created women because He couldn't teach sheep how to type" is this graceful poem by Jay Conner, poet floreate: "Little Beau Peep made love to a sheep (they met at a Union Street divv-

# HERB CAEN

## The Daily Dailiness

**I'M NOT THE** only one bugged by Wine-mogul Michael Mondavi's TV commercial for the phone company, during which he refers to restaurateurs as "restauraNtOORS." Writes Mondavi: "It grates on me, too. As a veteran of the 'one more take' business, you'll understand when I tell you it was my 54th! And none of us wanted to redo it" ... Meanwhile, dozens of readers have sent in Xeroxes of a page from Webster's Collegiate Dictionary attesting that "restauranteur" is in there. A second choice to "restaurateur," true, but there. It still grates. Webster's Unabridged will have nothing to do with "restauranteur," and hooray for Old Faithful.

★ ★ ★

**LAST THINGS FIRST:** One of the more publicized local marriages was delayed for a month while the loving couple hashed out a detailed divorce settlement, to be used in case of marital failure. Little details like this make for a carefree honeymoon ... Does Ashley Stone sound like a Southern belle? She is — from No'th Ca'lina. She is also the new Mrs. Dwight Clark, she and the Niners' sturdy star having entered holy bedlock last wkend ... I'm claiming a typo on that one ... I didn't know that Henry Chung of the famed Hunan Restaurant owned the building housing Tommaso's, best of the pizza places, till the Crotti family, which runs Tommaso's, bought the Kearny St. landmark for \$540,000. This is good news. If the rent had kept going up, the restaurant eventually would have disappeared, to be replaced by yet another Palazzo di Porn.

★ ★ ★

**CONGRESSWOMAN** Barbara Boxer was in Helsinki, poised for a trip into Russia on behalf of the Bay Area Council on Soviet Jewry, when the Korean 747 was shot down. She canceled her trip on the spot, and is now back here ... Capsule critique: The Symphony Gala Tues. night, which officially opened the fall culchuh season, was crowded, fun and remarkable for a revelation: Davies Hall has at last been "tuned" perfectly. Too bad there was so little to listen to, but Edo de Waart is no fool. Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever" has saved many a concert, and the old fellow came through again, in a shower of balloons ... Unless Speaker Willie B. and The Assembly can override Gov. Duke's blue pencil, a most valuable train goes out of business at the end of the month. That would be The Spirit of California — known to its crew as "The Medfly" — which runs overnight from Sacramento to L.A. via the



# HERB CAEN



## Cut Along Dotted Lines

**CAEN OPENERS:** Dr. Jay Protass of Castro Valley is among those who are extremely concerned about rioting in the streets following the verdict. "If Woody gets the kids," he warns, "all hell will break out" ... Headline looking for a newspaper: "Marla Plays Her Trump Card" ... As for multibillionaire Bill Gates getting married, what kind of honeymoon can you have with a young man whose claim to fame is Microsoft? ... No comment, no-brainer namephreak in the latest issue of Supermarket News: "Customers are trading up to condoms with spermicides at Pay Less Supermarkets, according to Dick Sizemore, nonfood merchandiser" ... Dry humor in sacred places: the Rev. Robert L. Grove, pastor of Covenant Presbyterian in Napa, forwards a copy of Currents, a Northern Calif. church newsletter, in which we read that "the Rev. Frank White, lead pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Napa, was recently recognized as 'the best-dressed man in Napa County' by the Center for the Visually Impaired. Second place went to a hydrant at the corner of 5th and Elm. 'It had been recently painted,' the Rev. White remarked."

★ ★ ★

**FURTHER** news from inner space: Mikhail Gorbachev will be at the Presidio Fri. morning to dedicate the Gorbachev Foundation U.S.A. hdqs. there, but that's not the exciting part. He will also do "a live interactive satellite teleconference with" — you'll never guess — "singer-songwriter Billy Joel in New York." With this, Gorbach's conversion to capitalism is complete ... Add social notes from all over: Among the participants in the White House Easter Egg Roll Mon. were S.F. supe Roberta Achtenberg, her domestic partner, Judge Mary Morgan, and their 5-year-old son, Benjie ... Further fun & frivolity: Ex-Gov. Jerry Brown threw a birthday party Mon. night at Tommaso's in North Beach for another former governor — his father, Pat, celebrating his 88th birthday with his wife, Bernice, and members of the extensive Brown clan. Jerry took over the whole place and picked up the tab without a blink. "Not only that," says Agostino Crotti, mindful of Jerry's reputation as being careful with a buck, "he left a full 20 percent tip." Yes, there was a "per" in there ... Spring is in the air, wherefore Nate Thurmond, the 52-yr-old star of basketball and barbecues, is about to get married for the first time. After a 12-yr. courtship, he and Marcie Kollar, 48-yr-old office mgr. of the big law firm of Thelen Marrin Johnson & Bridges, will wed on May 1 and throw a big reception at Stars.

★ ★ ★

# HERB CAEN



## 3-Dot Journalism Survives

**FILLED** with Christmas bonhomie, atty. Melvin Belli bellicosely dismissed his office manager by booting her out — literally. "Hurt my foot doing it," he says jocularly. "She's a real hard-ass," and, I should add, not amused. A non-kicking lawyer is being consulted ... If that starry-eyed politica checks into the background of the youngish stud she's so taken with, she'll discover he has been sued by his parents for \$162,831 (fraud charge) and by Wells Fargo for \$277,587 on a loan that went sour. Bankruptcy saved him ... The Giants' new owners continue to think big. Now they're after ABC's sportscasting star, Al Michaels, to do the televised games on Ch. 2, but of course he wants serious money. And you probably heard by now that it's by-baby for Ron Fairly, who provided so much honest amusement as Hank Greenwald's radio play-by-play partner. Ron's replacement, Ted Robinson, won't be half as much fun ... Carmen Crotti, the ravishing co-owner of the best pizza place in town (Tommaso's), was married New Year's Day to Charles Rudnik, local video producer, at Squaw Creek in the High Sierra. The ceremony was performed by Alan Rothstein, the noted Daly City divorce lawyer, but please, no cheap snickers. Alan is also Dep. Commr. of Marriages in San Mateo County. Now you may snicker.



WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1990



## Once Upon a Deadline

★ ★ ★  
DOUBLE HEADER: Movie director Francis Coppola was busy as a wren with a piece of string Monday, flying back and forth between his Zoetrope Studio at Columbus and Jackson and Tommaso's famous pizza restaurant a block away up Kearny. At Zoetrope, in his historic Sentinel Bldg., he was splicing the finishing touches on "Godfather III." At Tommaso's, he was slaving over the oven, turning out pizza for mobs of people sampling the latest bottling of his Napa Valley vineyard, the '85 Niebaum-Coppola Rubicon, a red. Among the tasters was singer Lainie Kazan, a college classmate of Coppola's, who took a sip and said, "Barbra Streisand!" Eh? "Great nose, good body." Oh ... My only worry was that Francis would get the film mixed up with the pizza, thereby delaying the Christmas Day opening of "Godfather." He wasn't certain where it'll play here but "thinks" it'll be the Northpoint. Start standing in line.  
★ ★ ★

We are all saddened by Herb Caen's final sign off. He not only filled our morning with his own brand of journalistic wisdom and wit, but also was an ambassador for what is uniquely The City. He helped define us. We will miss looking for our mention both gastronomic and personal. Our 60 some years of business was chronicled by The Column.

In celebration we offer the following of his favorites...

Appetizer  
Garlic Bread  
1/2 Asparagus 1/2 Zucchini in Vinaigrette  
First Course  
Coo Coo Clams (fresh clams marinated and baked)  
Second Course  
Small Pepperoni Pizza  
Dessert  
Traditional Cannoli  
Wine  
2 Glasses of Chianti Classico

The above dinner for two is \$35



1947

"At Lupo's where the pizza makes your heart sing."

1977

"Today's Quiz: Identify the fine North Beach Italian restaurant named for a Chinese. Right: Tommaso's, formerly Lupo's, and still the home of the best pizza in town, owned by the Crotti family, but named in honor of the cook Tommy "Tommaso" Clin. Along with the splendid food, the place still retains the bohemian flavor of the 1930's - garlicky, of course. Every time I walk in I expect to see the late founder, Frankie Cantelupo, in his usual position: on his knees alongside a table, crying real tears as he describes the agonizing beauty of the baked clams and fried squid..."

1994

"Just another day in the life of beautiful Carmen Crotti, co-owner of Tommaso's historic pizza parlor in North Beach: she worked a full shift Saturday night, and early the next morning gave birth to a baby girl..."

1995

"Before I forget, happy 60th anniversary, to Tommaso's (originally Lupo's) in North Beach, which had the first brick oven in town and still turns out the best..."

Tommaso's 1042 Kearny Street San Francisco, California



# In San Francisco, good food and good deeds, too

■ SAN FRANCISCO  
Continued from Page C10

en a break. No word on when she will resume business. . . . North Beach's Columbus Day celebration and parade have been scheduled for Oct. 9. . . . Liguria Bakery, at the corner of 1700 Stockton and Filbert streets near Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral, specializes in focaccia. Get there early, the lines are long, and they sell out in a hurry. . . . And if you're looking for Price Row (near Union and Stockton), forget it. It has been renamed Ferlinghetti Way, after the Italian/American poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti.

Gump's, a city landmark, will be moving from 250 to 135 Post St. this fall. . . . Another move: The Swiss National Tourist Office at Union Square has been relocated to L.A., one of Swissair's gateway cities. . . . Tucked away on a residential stretch of Nob Hill (next to the Ritz-Carlton) is the 20-room Nob Hill Lambourne, a business-oriented hotel where you won't find a flower or a chocolate mint on your pillow at



PHOTO / KEN FRIEDMAN

Yerba Buena Gardens with its Art Galleries and Center for the Arts Theater.

night, but rather beta carotene and a simple philosophical bedtime quote: . . . Nice to see old friend Alex Rappold still on the job as maitre d' at the Stanford Court Hotel. Zurich-born, he's been there 22 years. . . . Joyce Goldstein of Square One is the James Beard winner as California chef of the year. . . . For a bit of France, try Cafe Claude at 7 Claude Lane off Bush and Kearny (near Signor Giannini's Bank of America). Casual ambience, good food and great jazz. Can't wait to go back! . . . More good music: Lavay Smith and the red hot skillet lickers perform to packed houses every Monday night at Enrico's (Broadway at Kearny) and Saturday nights at Cafe du Nord on Market street near Sanchez. . . . So much is being done out here to help the needy. At Tomasso's, one of North Beach's oldest pizza houses, all leftover food is given to

the homeless and to hospices. We're told that this is repeated at most restaurants in town. And at the San Francisco Hilton, the largest hotel on the West Coast with more than 2,000 rooms, "Chefs for Kids" - a \$55 dinner series - benefits the Tenderloin After School Program. Kuleto's Robert Helstrom is the next chef to be featured (June 23). For reservations and information, call (415) 202-7007. . . . More than 1,100 strong attended the recent reopening of Fillmore Auditorium, the city's hallowed rock 'n' roll hall, which had been closed since the 1989 earthquake. . . . World's largest Timberland store (so we're told) - one block long - has been opened at 100 Grant Ave. . . . If you like flowers, you're going to love 575 Market Street, home to the World Oil Museum and the adjacent Chevron Garden where the flowers are changed every six weeks. . . .

Only in California: Autumn Harvests' roasted pistachios now come chili-, lemon-, garlic- and jalapeno-flavored at either 402 Sutter St. or at the SF Center on Market Street. . . . Attention motorists: Construction will begin next February on Lombard Street. No, not to straighten "the world's crookedest street" but to replace water and sewer pipes and to reconstruct the brick roadway. Work is expected to take three to four months. . . . BART, the Bay Area's growing rapid transit system, may raise its fares by a nickel in '95. . . . As part of the city's earthquake-preparedness drill, 48 sirens were supposed to sound on a late-April morning. Disregarding the fact that as many as nine failed - including the one outside City Hall - one tourist was overheard saying: "Which comes first, the earthquake or the alarm?"



# Our Readers Respond...

## & The Votes Are In!



A tip of our hat and a grateful bow to all the readers who responded to our "best" and "worst" ballot.

Our tabulators are through tabulating, and here are the results of your votes:

	Best	Worst
Newspaper Columnist:	Herb Caen (Chronicle)	Herb Caen (Chronicle)
Television Anchorperson	Dave McElhatton (Ch. 5)	Van Amburg (Ch. 7)
Television Reporter	David Fowler (Ch. 5)	Rigo Chacon (Ch. 7)
	Ed Arno (Ch. 2)	
Television Weatherperson	Pete Giddings (Ch. 7)	Pete Giddings (Ch. 7)
Television Sportscaster	Wayne Walker (Ch. 5)	Tony Conigliaro (Ch. 4)
		Jim Celandia (Ch. 7)
Radio Discjockey	Gene Nelson (KSFO)	Dr. Don Rose (KFRC)
Pizza	Tomasso's	Shakey's
Delicatessen	Lucca's	New York City Deli
Ice Cream	Gelato's	Baskin / Robbins
Bottled Water	Calistoga	Perrier
Hamburger	Balboa Cafe	Jack in the Box
Singles Bar	Perry's	
Neighborhood Bar	Bus Stop	Danny's
	John Barleycorn's	
	Mulerevey's	
Dance Establishment	I-Beam	Oz
		Buzby's
Live Music	Great Am. Music Hall	Pierce St. Annex
Fancy Restaurant	Ernie's	Fab Mab
	Le Club	Ernie's
	La Bourgogne	
Cheap Restaurant	U.S. Cafe	Zim's
Cup of Coffee	Cafe Trieste	Zim's
		McDonald's
Maitre'D	Drogomir (Vanessi's)	
Meat Market	Petrini's	Safeway
Bakery	Victoria Pastry	Eppler's
	Just Desserts	
Cheese Shop	Wine & Cheese Center	Safeway
		Caravansary
Fish Restaurant	Scott's	Alioto's
Martini	Financial Corner	
Fast Food Restaurant	McDonald's	Jack in the Box
Wine	Mondavi Fume Blanc	Almaden
		Gallo
Bartender	Bob Mulhern - Perry's	
Tourist Trap	Ghirardelli Square	Fisherman's Wharf
Movie Theater	Castro	Strand
Neighborhood	Marina	Sunset
		Tenderloin



# In Search of the Perfect Pizza

The loyalists are right — there are differences

"Hey, let's not go out. Let's send out for a pizza."

"Okay, just tell me which place to call."

"Oh, it doesn't matter, they're all the same."

By Joan Chatfield-Taylor

**A**h, but are they all the same? Is there a great secret pizza factory that slaps out pizzas by the millions, all with the same tomato sauce, the same layer of Mozzarella, ready to be festooned with pepperoni, mushrooms and an occasional anchovy?

No. Individuality still reigns in the world of take-out pizzas. The loyalists are right. There are differences between the pizzas that fly around the city each night.

To measure these differences, The Chronicle ordered from five of San Francisco's best reputed pizza establishments and asked a panel of pizza fans to give their opinions.

The experts were Italian Deputy Trade Commissioner Maria Luisa Pisano, cooking teacher Rick O'Connell and Peter and Alexander Fields, teen-agers who order pizzas frequently.

The pizzas — one sausage, one combination from each restaurant — came from Dario's, DePaula's, Giorgio's, Tommaso's and Victor's, all highly recommended by their partisans.

The panelists were asked to rank them on the basis of appearance, generosity and, most important of all, taste.

Authenticity, Italian-style, was not a consideration: pizza, American-style, bears about as much resemblance to its Italian forebears as does chop suey to authentic Chinese cuisine.

According to Maria Luisa Pisano, "The most beautiful pizza of all is pizza Napoletana alla marinara. It has fresh tomatoes, olive oil, oregano, salt and pepper — that's all — on a very thin crust."

That authentic recipe is pretty Spartan compared to American style pizzas laden with everything from meatballs to bean sprouts.

The winners at the tasting?

Almost every panelist picked Tommaso's and Giorgio's pizzas for either first or second place. Tommaso's (formerly Lupo's) got high praise for handsome, symmetrical appearance and generous

flavorful toppings.

Giorgio's pizzas were frankly less lovely to look at, but the panelists praised the thin, crisp crust and the fresh taste of tomatoes generously applied. Cheese-lovers might consider Giorgio's ungenerous, but the lack of a heavy layer of cheese may be a blessing.

"Considering what San Francisco Mozzarella tastes like, it may be a good idea to avoid it," said one panelist.

Next ranked were Victor's and DePaula's. Victor's, whose partisans are among the most ardent in town, was the most controversial of the pizzas on the table.

Some panelists criticized the crust and found the topping too oily. On the favorable side, both pizzas featured an especially delicious sausage that was judged to be flavored with fennel. Victor's combination pizza was the most refined of the five, with mushrooms, pepperoni and sausage sliced very thin.

DePaula's got high points for generosity, if not subtlety. The combination was laden down with a little of everything and a lot of onions and peppers, which offends purists.

"Until I moved to California from New York, I had never tasted a pizza with peppers and onions," said Rick O'Connell, casting a disapproving glance at what some people refer to as "a garbage pizza."

Tradition aside, DePaula's pizzas are meals in themselves. Unsurprisingly, both teenagers gave them high marks.

Bringing up last place was Dario's, which got poor marks for looks, due to its uneven, burned crust and the fact that most of the goodies — lavish amounts of peppers, onions, etc. — had landed on one half of the combination pizza. A heavy layer of Mozzarella on the sausage pizza was almost impossible to cut.

Money wasn't a factor. Tommaso's was far and away the most expensive, with two small pizzas coming to \$13. Giorgio's, ranked almost equally, charged \$8.95. Victor's two small pizzas were \$9.74, Dario's were \$10.75 and DePaula's charged \$8.75 for the two. Dario's and DePaula's both deliver (no checks, but you can use Master Charge or Visa). Tommaso's, Giorgio's and Victor's take phone orders, usually promising that the pizzas will be ready to be picked up in about 20 minutes.

The moral of this effort: There is a difference between pizzas. It's worth



# The City's best pizza

## Tommaso's pizza

So the claim from a respected adolescent pizza expert that Tommaso's makes the best pizza in the city came as quite a surprise. My son and I decided to try one that night. After a lengthy negotiation we settled on a large, topped with sausage, mushrooms and peppers (\$20.50). My expert drove my newish car (the only time), so he could double park in North Beach while I ran in to pick up and pay, of course.

My memories of this North Beach fixture proved accurate. Nothing had changed about the windowless interior with a long communal table stretching down the middle of the room, flanked by smaller tables separated by wooden partitions. The surroundings looked well maintained, freshly painted, spotless. It was early evening so the glass-covered tables weren't full yet but a small stack of boxed pizzas were waiting to be picked up for early dinners. We whisked ours home and ate it still hot.

The thin crust was both crisp and tender, and had a chewiness that reminded me of the great pizzas of Naples which are extremely simple yet sublime. The charm of the Tommaso's crust comes not so much from smokiness from the oak fire, which is barely detectable, but from the unique texture created by an intensely hot fire. The topping was

much thicker than any Neapolitan pizza, but not as gloppy as Blondie's or conventional American-style pizzas. You could taste each ingredient; the thinly sliced mushrooms which seemed to melt into the cheese, the spicy sliced Italian sausage, the aromatic roasted peppers. I folded the big slices lengthwise and ate them like a sandwich, the way the Neapolitans do, except that more cheese and filling oozed out. The expert used knife and fork. All told, the Tommaso's pizza left such a fine impression on both of us that we agreed to go back.

It didn't happen. The pizza expert dropped out and I returned to eat in Tommaso's dining room only with adults. We sampled from every category on the menu: an antipasto of broccoli, green beans, chickpeas, roasted pepper, zucchini and eggplant all lightly marinated in lemon juice and olive oil (\$13); tasty veal "rolletini" stuffed with prosciutto and runny mozzarella (\$17); a soft, puffy lasagne layered with béchamel and meat sauce and cooked in the wood-burning oven (\$11.50) — the ultimate comfort food.

Best of all were the pizzas: a fabulous thin-crust cheese pizza topped with garlicky dressed baby spinach salad and shaved parmesan (\$15 for a small); a fine Neapolitan-style pizza with just cheese and tomato sauce (\$13/small); and an irresistible sliced Italian sausage and mushroom pizza (\$15/small).

We drank refreshing Italian wines in the low \$20 range. Our plates were changed often by attentive servers, since we shared everything. Even the wait for a table was short at around 7 p.m. on a Tuesday night. (Tommaso's doesn't take reservations.) And most important of all, Tommaso's makes a pizza that brings the whole family together. Sometimes it takes the young to rediscover something old.

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## TOMMASO RISTORANTE ITALIANO

1042 Kearny St., San Francisco  
(415) 398-9696. Open Tuesday through Saturday from 5 to 10:30 p.m., Sunday 4 to 9:30 p.m.  
Rating: Would I go back? Yes, for the delicious thin-crust pizzas cooked in the wood-fired brick oven.

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## PIZZA OF THE WEEK: Tommaso's

**T**ommaso's has served locals and tourists for more than 60 years. It has been claimed — and never seriously disputed — that this North Beach Italian restaurant is ground zero for wood-fired pizza, fired up decades before Alice Waters and Wolfgang Puck made their contributions. The oven dates back to 1935, when the restaurant was called Lupo's. It became Tommaso's in 1971 and was bought by the Crotti family in 1973.

**Size:** 12 inches and 15 inches (\$14-\$23.50).

**Style:** Neapolitan.

**Oven:** Oak wood-fired oven that bakes at 800 degrees for 2-3 minutes.

**Crust:** A bread-like rim, charred and blackened in some spots, is the hallmark of this hefty pizza that seems a little thicker than most Neapolitan pies. The tender crust has a hint of crispness on the bottom, and is chewy at the edge.

**Pizza tried:** The Neapolitan (of course), made only with ladles of sweet tomato sauce and what seems like pounds of mozzarella cheese. It's good, but there are so many toppings that the natural goodness of the crust is buried.

**Other toppings:** There are 19 pizzas, all with tomato sauce and mozzarella. Fresh spinach and shaved Parmesan is one of the most popular.

**Anything but pizza:** Pastas such as spaghetti and meatballs, and calamari with marinara; wood oven-baked meats including veal Marsala and chicken cacciatore. There's a good Caesar, and the



FREDERIC LARSON/The Chronicle

house specialty is baked coo-coo clams.

**Vitals:** 1042 Kearny St., San Francisco, (415) 398-9696. Dinner Tuesday-Sunday. Credit cards accepted. No reservations. Takeout available.

— Michael Bauer

**Readers say:**

"Tommaso's is by far the best pizza in the city. A real San Francisco food experience served by a real charming Italian family. It is also a great place to bring out-of-towners."

— Nina Greenstein, Oakland

"While so many restaurants today get it wrong, Tommaso's always seems to get it right. The crowds don't lie. I have been eating at Tommaso's since the late '80s, and like a fine wine, it gets better with age."

— Tessa Rudnick, Long Island City, N.Y.

"When there's a line, Tommaso's is worth the wait."

— Frank Fudem, San Francisco

"Wait a minute, what's going on?? Everyone commenting is AGREEING. Obviously this joint is yummy. And no one has even insulted Mr. Bauer yet."

— Greg Gioia, Berkeley



# San Jose Mercury News

## In a time of change, give pizza a chance

THIN-CRUST PIES LEAD THE WAY AT TOMMASO'S IN S.F.

By Sheila Himmel  
Mercury News

So much has changed. But not Tommaso's. What a relief.

A half-block south of North Beach's Broadway, Tommaso's has squeezed 60 people into its underground grotto seats since 1935. No doubt in many of the same wooden chairs since 1973, when Agostino Crotti took over.

The jovial, roundish proprietor sets a welcoming tone. Much of his family is here to serve you. The elderly *padrone* still does the books.

What else hasn't changed? Tommaso's excellent wood-fired pizza, calzone and lasagne. Even the cannoli, too often a tired toss-away in restaurants, is still good. Many family outings to San Francisco could end happily with dinner at Tommaso's. Many dates could begin there.

Way before wood-fired pizza came to Wolfgang Puck, Tommaso's brick oven was the best in the West. It started as Lupo's. When the Cantalupo family passed the restaurant to their chef, he named it for



PATRICK TEHAN — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

Above, Mai, left, and Tomi Kushner with their pizzas at Tommaso's in San

### Wine while you wait

At peak times, you give your name and prepare to stand and wait. Wine is served on the sidewalk, a charming custom. Also refreshing, there are no buzzers, beepers or fancy homing devices. They call your name and you sit.

Most people get pizza. Wood-firing gives the crust a smoky flavor and a non-greasy bottom. Chewy, thin-crust and foldable, pizza comes in 19 straightforward varieties. Though apparently they can be amplified. When we ordered No. 1, the Neapolitan, the server asked if we wanted fresh basil. For a 15-inch mozzarella and tomato sauce pizza at \$17.50, or 12 inches at \$13, yes indeed. Pour on the basil.

Pizza is served on a raised stand, making it easier to inhale the woody aromas and eat salads simultaneously.

We passed up every such healthful opportunity in favor of carbo-loading. But Tommaso's offers a well-regarded olive oil and lemon dressing on chilled broccoli or string beans (\$5.75). Other salads: zucchini in vinaigrette (\$6.25), dinner salad (\$5.75), garbanzo (\$5.75) and Caesar (\$7).

Vegetarians will never leave Tommaso's hungry. Meatless entrees include many pizzas, cheese ravioli with pesto (\$11), spaghetti with marinara sauce (\$10) and eggplant Parmigiana (\$11). There's also a vegetarian antipasto platter (\$13).

If you do eat meat, the lasagne (\$11.50) is a terrific venue. Hot and creamy cheese, chopped beef and sausage in vibrant tomato sauce, and

### TOMMASO'S

1042 Kearny St., San Francisco (415) 398-9696

\*\*\*

**The Dish:** Cozy family-style trattoria, since 1935, is the real thing.

**Price range:** Dinner appetizers, \$5.75-\$13, entrees, \$10-\$23.50.

**Details:** Wine and beer. No reservations.

**Phases:** Wood-fired pizza, lasagne and calzone. Do not wine list.

**Minuses:** Bill adds up fast. Can be a long wait.

**Hours:** Dinner 5-10:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 4-9:30 p.m. Sunday.

Restaurant reviews are conducted anonymously. The Mercury News pays for all meals.

practice. In November, there was spaghetti *alla carbonara* (\$12) with chunks of pancetta, onions, egg and parsley. Unlike many restaurant carbonaras, this one was not overly rich.

Veal scaloppine piccante (\$17) was tender and tangy with lemon and herbs. Veal scaloppine also comes as Marsala and parmigiana. And that's not all. Veal comes sautéed with fresh peppers and mushrooms, and as *rolletini*, broiled and stuffed with prosciutto and cheese.

The wood-fired oven does chicken, eggplant parmigiana, fish dishes and Tommaso's signature calzone. They call it Italian Turnover Specialty. Although this calzone is not the usual breadly half-moon that ate Naples, a small (\$16) would easily feed two. Ricotta oozed, mozzarella melted, and just

Grillate Riserva Sangio while you wait, or a (\$25) with dinner. Dry, fruity, it's perfect with food.

### Varied list

The wine list basically covers each major grape, bottles from \$17 to \$25. There's also a more hip tin' cellar list, including Stefano Farina Barolo and a '96 Canalicchio Bi di Montalcino (\$69). C is \$10.

Desserts kept up the Sweet ricotta cannoli was thankfully free of fruit in a crisp, recent pastry tube. Tiramisu was good, served in with a dusting of cocoa. A plate of house (\$4.75) is another treat an espresso cup of ve for dipping.

Italian roast coffee is cup, \$3.50 for two, \$4.40 for four cups.

Seating is at a long table, or in low-walled bles. Everyone is in good time.

On our way down B to historic Tommaso's, er visitor pointed to ner at Columbus Ave of the club that launched dancing in 1964 a mous 20-foot sign. "C da's Condo Club use there," he told his fanpanion.

Sheesh. Condos have been invented during heyday at the Condo. But the guy should mended for an interview.



BY BEN FONG-TORRES

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

**E**VEN JUST a few days ago, the idea was unfathomable, but Francis Ford Coppola is relaxed and at peace.

Carrying a couple of loaded shopping bags, he strolls into the landmark North Beach building he owns. He's just done his first Christmas shopping in two years, which is how long he's been working on "The Godfather Part III."

The film, which had him working 20-hour days to meet Paramount's unbendable deadline, is finished, printed and shipped to 1,800 theaters, where they begin to unwind on Christmas Day.

The bearish, 51-year-old Coppola, often described in the press as arrogant, hostile and impatient, is none of these as he himself unwinds. Entering his office, he tosses down his bags and jacket and leads the way to a round table, where he takes a seat in one of six leather chairs, putting his back to a gorgeous view of Coit Tower and the hills of North Beach.

Dressed casually, his sky-blue shirt bearing the "FFC" monogram on his left pocket, he looks every bit the Italian family patriarch, the man who loves nothing more than to pop down Kearny Street to Tommaso to whip up a pizza, and who often makes and hosts dinners at his home in the Napa Valley, where he and his wife, Eleanor, have their own boutique winery, Niebaum Coppola.

"It's the first time I've been off the hook for a day," he says. Until he delivered the film a week ago, he was making fixes. The version shown in a handful of screenings—a sneak preview in Seattle and press showings in New York and Los Angeles—is different from the final version.

Coppola likens his films to plays, with screenings serving as opening nights, where he watches the audience as much as the film and notes their written or spoken reactions. "You incorporate what you learn," he says.

"The audience's reactions have been good. People have been moved. If they have some kind of experience, that makes it a hit."

But he also heard that the film seemed sluggish to some. Or, as the Hollywood Reporter's reviewer put it, "Godfather Part III" does not go to the mattresses, it goes to the boardroom, and mainstream viewers

nous being the ordered killing of his own older brother. Desperately trying to wrap up his life by going legitimate, he makes generous donations to the Catholic church

able, but mixed. So were the ones for movies he now refers to as "Godfather" and "Godfather II." Produced in 1972 and 1974, they were nine



Francis Ford Coppola: Budget climbed to \$54 million, not the rumored \$100 million

## Proud Papa Delivers 'Godfather III'

Coppola challenges critics  
over long-awaited sequel



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### PIZZA PERFECT

Not much has changed at Tommaso's, the North Beach haunt formerly known as Lupo's, since the days when Kyrle and Corso frequented its cavelike dining room. The pizzas are still wood-fired to crisp perfection, the seven-layer lasagne is as gooey as it's always been, and the house red continues to arrive in lucky ceramic pitchers. 1042 Kearny St. (415-398-9696) **more** ▶

tinghouse  
its biscuits  
b.

PHOTOGRAPHS: CLOUTIER; FOOD: BOB JOHNS; KENNEDY; PAPER: CAVIAR

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## ROBIN WILLIAMS

After the death of pal  
John Belushi, he wants  
out of the frenzied  
world according  
to Mork—but can  
he slow down?





## SAN FRANCISCO

Tommaso's



San Francisco is the home of gourmet pizza. Toppings range from the ridiculous (white truffles) to the sublime (artichoke hearts). But Tommaso's, a 47-year-old pizzeria in the Italian North Beach, specializes in the real thing: Agostino Crotti's Neapolitan pizza features superb cheese, subtle sauce and a woody flavor from the oak oven. This critic reluctantly sampled his companion's clam pizza and fell in love—with the pizza, that is. It is spectacular—slightly fishy, very garlicky—a sort of poor man's escargot. Singer Boz Skaggs, a regular, has veggie pizza with shrimp. Francis Coppola walks to Tommaso's from his nearby office and makes his own pizza, using fresh basil from his Napa Valley ranch. Crotti loves his pizza, but tries not to sample his own wares too often. "If I had a slice every day," he groans, then holds his hand an arm's length away from his stomach. When he eats out, Agostino confesses, "I go to Chinatown."

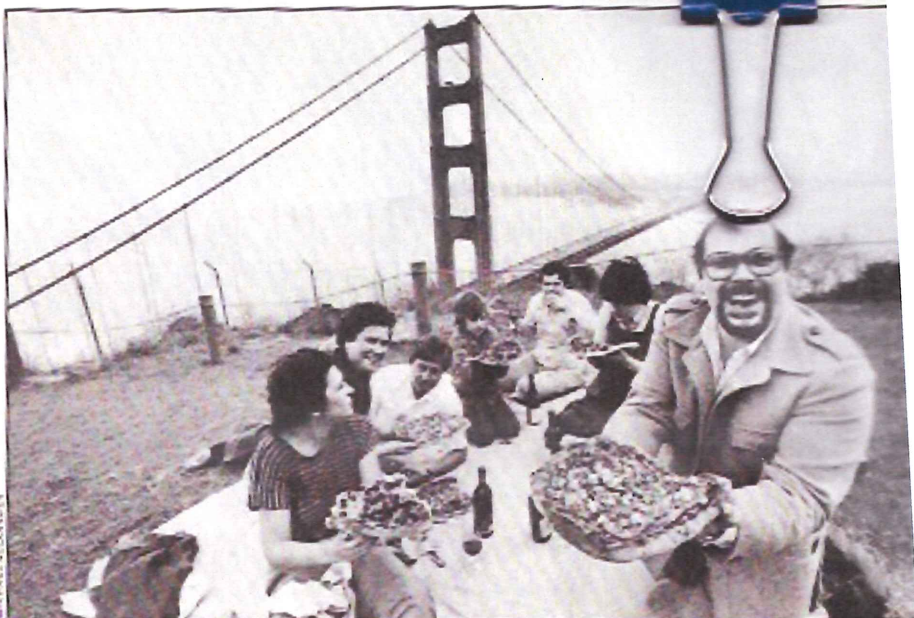
## NEW YORK

John's Pizzeria

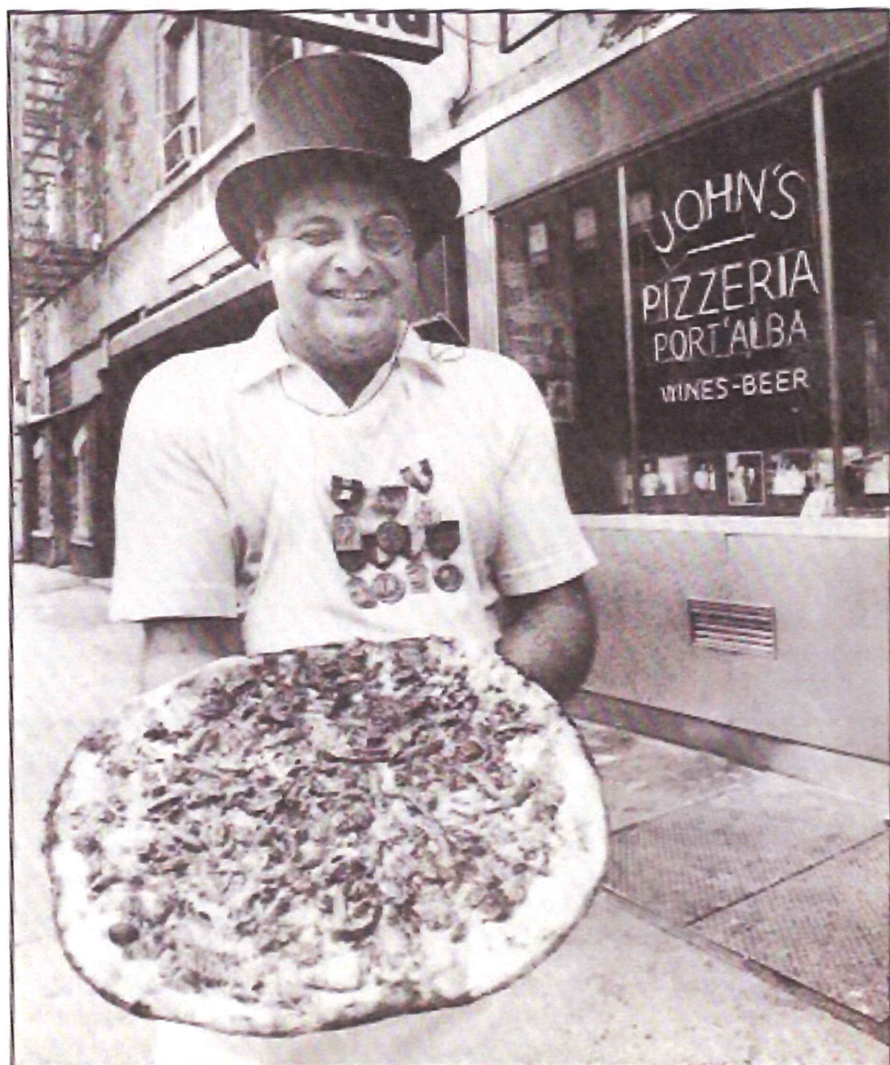


In the Big Apple, pizza is snack food, slurped by the slice, swimming in Olympic-size pools of grease. Ah, but John's is different. Owner Pete Castellotti, 42, serves only whole pies (from \$9.50 to \$10) in his cozy Greenwich Village establishment, where the clientele is as noteworthy as the pizza. When Warren Beatty brings Diane Keaton, they order peppers and onions on their pie; when Warren dines alone, he adds sausage too. Woody Allen takes his plain and eats the whole thing—a pound and a half of pizza. "And he's skinny," Pete marvels. Jack Nicholson, Mary Tyler Moore and Johnny Cash have also stopped by. What draws them? It could be the 53-year-old coal-burning oven, which gives the pizza a sharp flavor. Or perhaps it's the oily—but not too oily—mozzarella, rich and smooth, especially when bathed in mild garlic. Whatever, John's is usually packed, and patient pizzaphiles often spill out onto the sidewalk. "It's rough standing in the rain and snow in the winter," says Castellotti. But they wait.

CONTINUED



San Francisco's Agostino Crotti (right, front) and his family admire two of the city's most popular attractions: the Golden Gate Bridge and one of his pizzas.



The self-proclaimed Baron of Pizza, Pete Castellotti, started making pizza at age 15, and he hasn't lost his touch. His large sausage-pepper-onion-mushroom combo costs \$9.25.



# SAN francisco

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## ► Café Monk

564 FOURTH ST. (BET. DRYAN AND BRANNAN STS.), S.F., (415) 777-1331. \$\$. **WHY** The seasonal menu shows off the best of California cuisine—from superfresh oysters to grilled steak with house-made Worcestershire sauce. **THE SCENE** The crowd reflects SoMa's artistic roots. So does the space, a bilevel former design studio. **FAVORITE DISH** Wood-roasted mussels and clams on grilled levain bread. **BEST COCKTAIL** Warm apple cider spiked with Teaca, an Italian liqueur. **BEST-KEPT SECRET** The kitchen clips what might be the freshest greens in town from the garden at Limn Gallery, just across the street, right before dinner service.

## ► The French Laundry

6640 WASHINGTON ST. (AT CREEK ST.), YOUNTVILLE, (707) 944-2380. \$\$\$\$ **WHY** You know why. Perennial four-star chef/owner Thomas Keller prepares exquisite food that's as interesting as it is delicious. **THE SCENE** Pulsing with anticipation, as a dressed-up crowd gets ready for a meal they've been looking forward to for months. **FAVORITE DISH** Any version of the agnolotti—maybe corn with truffles or sweet potatoes and bacon. **BEST PLACE TO SIT** In the little stone alcove on the ground floor. (It's got three small tables; number eight is Keller's favorite.) **PET PEEVE** The astronomical \$50 corkage fee. **BEST-KEPT SECRET** Call between 4 and 5 p.m.; if you're flexible, you can often score a table for that night. **WHY I'LL ALWAYS LOVE THIS PLACE** As good as I think it will be, it's inevitably even better.



## ► Good Luck Dim Sum

736 CLEMENT ST. (BET. EIGHTH AND NINTH AVES.), S.F., (415) 386-3388. \$ **WHY** Behind the nondescript storefront you'll find spectacular dumplings and the best baked barbecued-pork buns in the city. **FAVORITE DISH** Translucent fried chive dumplings; they're simultaneously chewy and crisp. **THE SERVICE** Brusque, more helpful if you speak Chinese. **LEAST FAVORITE THING ON THE MENU** Shark fin dumplings, because harvesting shark fins is an environmental nightmare. **PET PEEVE** The line moves very slowly; you have to fight the urge to jump over the counter and help the staff total up the orders. **FAVORITE MEMORY OF EATING HERE** Finding a parking spot right outside—a miracle—and then discovering a short line and a freshly made batch of chive dumplings.

## ► Gordon's

6770 WASHINGTON ST. (AT MADISON ST.), YOUNTVILLE, (707) 944-8246. \$ **WHY** Looking like an old-school general store, Gordon's is the kind of comfort-food heaven you dream about finding. **THE SCENE** It's the wine-industry hangout. At any given time, you can be sitting next to Michael Havens or Margrit Biever Mondavi. **FAVORITE DISH** The chunky, tarragon-spiked potato salad that accompanies all the sandwiches. **FAVORITE MEMORY OF EATING HERE** Stumbling on Gordon's on a very hot day and having a wonderful lemon tart.

## ► One Market Restaurant

1 MARKET ST. (AT STEWART ST.), S.F., (415) 777-5377. \$\$\$\$ **WHY** One Market's newest chef, Adrian Hoffman, has given the signature California cuisine here an expert injection of European influences. **THE SCENE** Expense-account executives and an influx of well-dressed tourists. **FAVORITE DISH** Fanny Bay oyster soup. **THE SERVICE** So knowledgeable that you'd think the servers had trained in the kitchen; their recommendations are refreshingly honest. **PET PEEVE** The piano player, who accentuates the

feeling that One Market is an extension of the Hyatt across the street. **FAVORITE MEMORY OF EATING HERE** Watching the Bay Bridge light up at dusk while digging into the oyster soup.

## ► Sushi Ran

107 CALIFORNIA ST. (BET. PINE AND TURNER STS.), SAUSALITO, (415) 332-3620. \$\$ **WHY** It's not easy to find well-prepared fusion food, and even rarer to find it in combination with such stellar raw fish. **THE SCENE** The wooden-beamed space brings in all types and ages of sushi lovers and is always lively. **FAVORITE DISH** The 49er roll—it's got lightly marinated salmon, avocado, and tobiko and is served with a mix of fresh lemon juice and wasabi. **MUST-ORDER** The unusual little sawakani, crabs that are flown in weekly from Japan. **FAVORITE MEMORY OF EATING HERE** Craving sushi at 10:30 p.m., racing across the bridge, and sitting down 20 minutes later to some delicious albacore (shiro Maguro). **WHY I'LL ALWAYS LOVE THIS PLACE** It turned me into a sushi lover.

## ► Taylor's Automatic Refresher

933 MAIN ST. (AT POPE ST.), ST. HELENA, (707) 963-3486. \$ **WHY** After a tough day of wine tasting, Taylor's comes to the rescue with what wine guru Robert Parker calls the best double cheeseburger in the country. **FAVORITE DISH** The cheeseburger with grilled onions. **BEST DRINK** A superthick milk shake. **THE SERVICE** Young, friendly, and good-looking. **BEST PLACE TO SIT** At one of the shaded picnic tables in the back. **FAVORITE MEMORY OF EATING HERE** Stopping in for a "snack" before dinner at the French Laundry.

## ► Tommaso's

1042 KEARNY ST. (BET. BROADWAY AND PACIFIC AVE.), S.F., (415) 398-9096. \$\$ **WHY** The best pizza in San Francisco—crisp and thin-crust, with just the right amount of homemade tomato sauce, fresh mozzarella, and toppings that never get too

wacky. **THE SCENE** The softly lit room, complete with checked tablecloths, personifies North Beach Italian. Lots of couples come here, but everyone is too busy eating to be romantic.

**FAVORITE DISH** Spinach pizza.

**PET PEEVE** The wait is never comfortable: You stand or sit on the stairs in the entrance and get in someone's way.

**WHY I'LL ALWAYS LOVE THIS PLACE** No matter how long I wait—and sometimes it's a while—when the steaming hot pizza comes, it's always worth it.

## ► Ton Kiang

3821 GEARY BLVD. (BET. 22ND AND 23RD AVES.), S.F., (415) 387-8273. \$\$ **WHY** Everyone knows how wonderful the dim sum here is—as good as what's found at some of the fabled places in Hong Kong. **FAVORITE DISH** Water spinach or Chinese watercress, when in season. **MUST-ORDER** Any of the shrimp dim sum. **BEST PLACE TO SIT** The upstairs seems to get a steadier stream of dim-sum carts moving through it; the booths on the ground floor are cozy. **FAVORITE MEMORY OF EATING HERE** My first meal after moving to San Francisco was lunch at Ton Kiang that night. I came back for dinner.

## ► Zuni Café

1458 MARKET ST. (AT GOWAN ST.), S.F., (415) 552-2522. \$\$\$ **WHY** The exceptional California Mediterranean cuisine chef/owner Judy Rodgers and her staff pull from the wood-fired oven. **THE SCENE** All-night partiers who come in for a breakfast in the morning.

Concannon's  
to the (East) France  
Nickelodeon





## Tommaso's: On "Trendy" Burrata, Owning a Legacy

by Sophia Lorenzi May 11, 2012, 7:00am PDT



*Photo: Chloe Schildhause*

Famous for having the West Coast's first wood-burning oven and for serving pizzas to notable figures like **Herb Caen**, **George Lucas** and **Francis Ford Coppola**, **Tommaso's** in North Beach definitely falls into the "institution" category. The current owners, the Crotti family, have operated said institution since 1973, but the place itself dates back to 1935.

Originally called Lupo's (when it was owned by the Cantolupo family) the restaurant was sold to chef **Tommy Chin** in the late 60s. Naturally, he changed the name to **Tommaso's**. In 1973 Chin sold Tommaso's to the man who provided him with a croissant and coffee every morning, Agostino Crotti, a server at the then 21-year-old Cafe Trieste. To this day, Agostino still makes the pizza dough, and his sister Lidia serves as executive chef, sister Carmen greets and and waits tables and his wife, Anna, makes dessert.

We recently spoke with Agostino and his sister Carmen about the movie he's got a cameo in, and what you'll never see on a Tommaso's pizza, among other things.

**Tommaso's has been around for a long time, how has the menu changed?**

**Carmen Crotti:** We tried to keep as much of the original menu as we could. Ninety percent of the menu is still the same.

**Agostino Crotti:** Well, a very important thing, this place is famous for one reason and one reason only: the brick oven. That was built in 1935. That oven was the first in the West Coast. That's written in the books. When [Alice Waters at] Chez Panisse opened the upstairs in Berkeley she got the design for the oven from us and later on she gave it to Spago in Los Angeles for Wolfgang Puck. So everything started here.

**So the pizza's have definitely stayed the same.**

**AC:** Exactly, we never change them. I mean, we add a few new pizzas over the years to accommodate the new tastes. For the past 17-years we've been coming up with a pizza special every month.

**CC:** We have more vegetarian pizza. Burrata pizza, which until last year nobody knew what it was. And a lot of people still don't. So you try to keep the same old-school and try to implement the new stuff within reason. **We don't do truffles.**

**What do you think of other pizza places in San Francisco?**

**CC:** Pizza [in San Francisco] is a fad now. It really is.

**AC:** Everything started here, no question about it.

**CC:** Sure, there's competition but it hasn't hurt out business per se. We've always felt the more the merrier. We don't compete, there's no jealousy involved. But yes, pizza in San Francisco has evolved. Sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. People are branching out, trying new things which I think is always good. But sometimes you go a little overboard.

**AC:** Truffles on a pizza, things like that.



### **What are some other ingredients you never want to see on a pizza?**

**CC:** Oh! Honestly it's been a rule of ours, and I know a lot of people get upset, but it's Canadian bacon and pineapple. You will never ever see it here.

**AC:** But I go to Italy every year and I see French fries on a pizza. So there we go.

**CC:** You have no idea what they do. French fries and ketchup. On a pizza. That was last year's fad. And believe me, they were lining up to buy it. I'm more simple. Give me a margherita pizza and I'm a happy camper.

### **When you're not here, where do you like to go to eat pizzas?**

**CC:** I don't remember the last time I ate a pizza somewhere else. You live with it, you cook it, you serve it. We go out and eat Italian food all the time we really don't eat pizza out.

### **You have a lot of notable customers.**

**AC:** The Governor was here for his birthday in April. He came back last Tuesday with Nicholas Cage, The Coppolas have been close friends and customers forever. Francis [Coppola], when I met him at Trieste he was doing the script for *The Godfather* and I used to bring him the coffee and so forth. When he comes, he makes pizza. Not saying it's a perfect pizza, but he makes pizza...I mean if you want a list of celebrities we could be here for half an hour. From Sharon Stone, to Penelope Cruz, to Mickey Rourke, Robert Duvall.

**CC:** Robert Duvall was in here not too long ago.

**AC:** Let's not get into that with Robert Duvall, because we've been in the same movie together. *Hemingway & Gellhorn*, with director Phil Kaufman, with Clive Owen and Nicole Kidman, coming out on HBO at the end of this month. I play the chef, I have two small speaking roles. [Phil Kaufman] said he was looking for a bald, short, little-bit-ugly chef and I was the candidate.

**CC:** You blink, you miss.

### **What pizzas are you most known for?**

**CC:** The margherita. But I'll tell you the pizzas we sell the most. Of course kids love pepperoni, but the fresh spinach and parmesan pizza is probably our best selling pizza.

**AC:** Followed by the sausage and mushroom. We have some unusual ones that are very good. We have a seafood. A clam and garlic that is very good. Now we have a burrata, which is the trendy thing. A taste for everybody.

**How has the operation changed? Do you have the same chefs from when you opened?**

**CC:** We do not have a turnover. A couple of the cooks in the kitchen have been here forever.

**AC:** Forever. And a bus boy who has been here 30-years.

**So, if someone wants to get a job here it's impossible?**

**CC:** [laughs] It's very hard.

**AC:** Unless someone quits or drops dead.

**How do you continue to stand out in a sea of Italian restaurants?**

**CC:** Some of it honestly is recognition, and also Agostino and I, one of us is here every single night. Both of us, his wife, our sisters. Our mom was here, until she passed away. You walk into restaurants, and it happens to us all the time, you really don't know anybody. Even places you go to regularly. You might recognize one person, maybe two. Here, if you come in today, if you come in next week, if you come in next year, you'll find the same people.

**AC:** In North Beach we are the oldest Italian restaurant. We've been here 77 years, I mean the place. Everything around us has changed. Places opening up, places closing. The neighborhood has changes so much and we are the only true anchor in this section. A little bit of the red light district ambiance as you can tell. That came, everything came after this place.

**CC:** We were here before, and we will be here after.

*--Chloe Schildhause*



**Special Guide: How to Show Your Visitors the Best of the Bay Area  
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# San Francisco Focus

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Bay Area...

## Winning Restaurants OUR READERS CHOOSE THE BEST

### Eats

#### Pizza

**BEST:** Village Pizzeria, 3348 Steiner, San Francisco. Call ahead or don't arrive hungry—the word is out, and there's always a wait. Sentimental runner-up: Tomasso's, 1042 Kearny, San Francisco. It feels, looks and smells right.

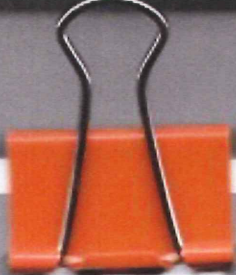
**UNCLASSIFIABLE:** Vicolo, 201 Ivy, San Francisco. New Wave pizza and calzone, odd, but nice. Why not?

**BEST, EAST BAY:** New Sunshine Pizza, 5891 Piedmont Ave., Oakland.

#### Best Pizza

- 1 Tomasso
- 2 Zachary's
- 3 Village Pizzeria
- 4 Vicolo

Everybody has their favorite pizza... our readers cast votes for over 80 pizzerias around the bay. But there's only one number one, and that's Tomasso (1042 Kearny, SF) with its delicious oak oven-baked pizzas. In the East Bay, Zachary's (5801 College Ave, Oakland) takes the number-two spot on the poll for its incredibly thick, deep-dish style pizza. Village Pizzeria (3348 Steiner and 1243 Van Ness Ave, SF) offers excellent Sicilian and Neapolitan pizzas. Vicolo (201 Ivy, SF) is the fanciest pizzeria in town, as befits its location—a hop, skip and jump from the Opera House and Davies Hall, it offers pizzas made from especially fine ingredients.



# RESTAURANTS *of* SAN FRANCISCO

NEW REVIEWS FROM THE

*SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE*

PLUS MORE THAN FIFTY

CRITICS' CHOICE RESTAURANTS

PATRICIA UNTERMAN  
AND STAN SESSER



onion—but they also get rammed with house-made tartar sauce or tarragon mayonnaise.

The desserts, often just emerging from the oven when you order them, are just like the rest of the food at Taxi—big and satisfying and stylishly prepared. The temptation of warm rhubarb cobbler with rich, crumbly top crusts, tall apple pies, and hot fudge and hot caramel sundaes leads diners into higher levels of gluttony. You think you can't eat one more bite and then you find yourself dipping into a large piece of chocolate cake with custard sauce. The Taxi kitchen knows how to bake, too.

Taxi strikes me as just the kind of operation that deserves success. Its owners put their time into learning how to cook professionally and run a dining room. Chuck Phifer graduated from the California Culinary Academy, where Jeremiah Tower was his teacher. He then went on to work at the Balboa Cafe for five years during the Tower regime. His partner and dining room manager, John Crucianelli, spent two and a half years waiting on tables and managing at the Santa Fe Bar and Grill in Berkeley. They learned from their mentors well.

They found a location in an area of town that's still developing, and they opened their place on a small manageable scale, avoiding the fatal consequences of undercapitalization. They built their restaurant from the kitchen outward, with their vision of what kind of food they wanted to serve determining what their place would be.

Because Taxi is so clearly dedicated to the food side of their operation, customers feel like beneficiaries behind their towering salads and bowls of hot cobbler. Hop in a cab! ■

—Patricia Unterman, June 7, 1987

## Tommaso's

★ ★

1042 Kearny Street, San Francisco 398-0800. Open Tuesday through Saturday from 8 to 10:45 P.M., Sunday 5 P.M. to 9:45 P.M. Beer, wine, MasterCard, Visa. No reservations. Expensive to moderate.

No one knows better than I how difficult it is to keep a restaurant vital over the years. Tommaso's, a North Beach landmark, has succeeded in keeping their food absolutely consistent and irresistible since opening fifty years ago.

It's as if time has stopped when you walk down into the poorly lit, cave-like dining room, with partitioned-off tables along the walls and a long communal table stretched down the middle. You can barely see the murals of the Naples coast from the poor light of ancient fixtures—and perhaps it's just as well. Decor is not the reason anyone goes to Tommaso's. It's the luscious smell of pizza baking in a wood-burning oven that makes you endure the long waits inside the drafty, chairless front vestibule. The restaurant takes no reservations and Tommaso's is as popular as ever.

If there's one universally loved item that Tommaso's makes, it's their pizza. Way before pizza baked in a wood-burning oven was a glimmer in Alice Waters's eye, Tommaso's was turning them out with perfect crisp, sweet, chewy crusts scented with smoke and copious amounts of whole-milk mozzarella, among other ingredients. The aroma of a vegetarian pizza blanketed with green pepper, onions, fresh mushrooms, and olives has driven me to ask for a small piece from the guy next to me at the long central table shared by many different parties. I never do that. The pizza super deluxe with mushrooms, peppers, ham, Tommaso's allspice-scented Italian sausage, and anchovies is spectacular—without the anchovies, which are too strong for this particular blend of ingredients. Frankly, the "pizza à la Neapolitan"

cheese and Tommaso's tasty tomato sauce is a delight. The superlative crust, so elastic, so full of character, so beautifully browned underneath as well as on the puffy edges, so enticingly smoky, needs very little elaboration.

Tommaso's also puts out a massive calzone stuffed with a skillful blend of ricotta and mozzarella, prosciutto, and Tommaso's special spice mixture that tastes greater than the sum of its parts. All the elements seem to melt together in a happy way inside the impeccably crisp, folded-over crust. A second calzone is stuffed with slices of the aromatically spicy Italian sausage, mushrooms, and a little tomato sauce, all of which seem to melt into the ricotta and mozzarella in a special way. The calzone withstand time. I eat them cold the next day.

Of course, Tommaso's still offers their famous starters, plates of peeled peppers, crisp whole string beans, and trees of bright green broccoli, all lightly dressed in lemon juice and olive oil. They're tasty and refreshing and just what you want before the rich pizzas and calzone. The zucchini, however, is sautéed in thick rounds before it's chilled and tends to be a little soggy, and the mundane dinner salad, innocuously dressed and full of mushy cooked carrot, is something to avoid.

What surprised me about Tommaso's on my recent visits was the quality of the pastas. A daily lasagna special, layered with tender fresh noodles and that winning combination of ricotta, mozzarella, and pleasant tomato sauce, was put together in such a way that putting your fork to it felt like cutting into a pillow. A similar cheese filling was rolled into house-made manicotti smothered in tomato sauce; and basically the same mixture of cheeses augmented by ground veal filled delicate house-made ravioli. You can get either of these dishes flanked with a sausage or delicate meatballs.

Some of the kitchen staff is Chinese. This explains why calamari were so tender and sensitively fried and a bowl of steamed clams, in an odd but not unpleasant broth seasoned with vinegar

food bespoke of the freshness that from wise Chinatown buying.

For dessert, a custardy spumoni into individual bowls comes as a departure from the artificial-tastemoni served all over North Beach.

The original recipes must have been carved in stone and executed with ing attention, because this beloved Beach joint really is as satisfying as it was when I first ate there—and tell you how long ago that was. ■

—Patricia Unterman, September

## Tommy Toy's

★

655 Montgomery Street, San Francisco 397-4888. Open for lunch Monday through Friday 11:30 A.M. to 3 P.M., for dinner through Saturday 6 to 10 P.M. Full bar, credit cards. Reservations accepted. Expensive.

Proudly printed across the top of the menu at Tommy Toy's in the Montgomery-Washington Tower is this: "The Chef's Specialties for the Spring." Matters of syntax aside, the season is late summer, but at Tommy Toy's time does seem to have stopped.

The elegant and mysterious room has the exoticism of a film noir set. Not a ray of natural sunlight lies the created environment. A number of plots could be hatched at the bar, or more intimately in a tiny tentlike room at one end of the collection of chinoiserie, including play of small pieces of ancient along the wall on the way to the room, screens, vases, furniture, porcelain table lamps, and other moldings are set off against the texture of celadon. It's not hard to find a trench-coated leading man with this richly furnished Asian room weapon concealed by the shade from hundreds of tiny lamps.)





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January 13, 1978

Mr. Agostino Crotti  
Tommaso Famous Pizzeria  
1042 Kearny Street  
San Francisco, California 94133

Dear Mr. ~~Crotti~~, *Agostino*

I was pleased to see that the Bay Guardian  
named Tommaso Famous Pizzeria "The Very Best of  
San Francisco and the Bay Area".

My congratulations and all good wishes.

Cordially,

*Milton Marks*  
MILTON MARKS

MM:ctly



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**2000**

# **Best Pizza**

## **Tommaso's Restaurant**

### **The Verdict**

A pizza joint in the classic mold, North Beach's Tommaso's is widely regarded as one of the city's best.

### **One of the Bay Area's Best**

Nominated for Best Pizza for crisp, wood-fired crusts and classic toppings.

### **Parking Trouble**

North Beach is notoriously difficult for parking. Try Muni or a cab to save yourself the headache.

### **The Scene**

It's not always as crowded as it was in the '70s and '80s, when Francis Ford Coppola was a regular customer and Wolfgang Puck and People Magazine sang praises the praises of the crisp, cheese-covered disks, but that only means that you don't have to wait quite as long for a table. Aside from the selection of 19 different wood-fired pizzas, the menu features straightforward, homestyle Italian dishes; the lasagna and the ravioli are especially good.

### **The Scene**

With a friendly, noisy, dimly lit ambiance, landmark Tommaso's is right at home in bustling North Beach. The wall murals, depicting Naples' seascapes, date back to 1935, and not a lot else has changed here since the cozy, family-owned restaurant was founded some 63 years ago. And that's a good thing.

—David Thomsen



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### **TOMMASO RESTAURANT**

**1042 Kearny Street 398-9696**

**Dinner: Tues-Sat 5-10:45, Sun 4-9:45**

**Credit Cards: MC, VISA**

**Reservations not accepted; Wine & beer only**

Tommaso's is a North Beach institution—people in the know have been coming here since 1935. Crunchy crusted pizzas from an old-world, oakwood-burning oven are the *piece de resistance*. Try the unusual *Calzone Imbottito*, a pizza turnover stuffed with ricotta, mozzarella, prosciutto and spices; or any of the pizzas. I particularly like the one topped with Tommaso's homemade sausage and mushrooms. Just as delicious, though, are Tommaso's pastas. This is one of the few places in town to serve one of my old favorites, *manicotti*, wide hollow pasta tubes filled with ricotta and spices, smothered in a rich tomato sauce. Whatever else you order, don't miss the Coo-Coo Clams soaked in oil and vinegar and baked in the oven. For dessert, there's often housemade *tiramisu*, combining rum, ladyfingers, mascarpone and chocolate; or do as the Italians do and order the *biscotti* served with a dessert wine for dipping. The small, cave-like dining room fills up nightly and reservations are not accepted, so it's best to arrive early. The prized tables are the ones along the side walls (with wood partitions between them making for booth-like coziness). Service is swift and efficient. Tommaso's rustic Neapolitan specialties are also available for take-out.

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# ZAGAT SURVEY®

## **TOMMASO'S**

FOOD	DECOR	SERVICE	COST
<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>\$29</b>

"You always know what you'll get" at this affordable, "unpretentious" eatery in North Beach, and that's "superb" "thin-crust" pizzas pulled from a "wood-burning oven", as well as other "old-school" Neapolitan fare (think "lots of red sauce"); it's "nothing fancy" and the impatient "hate the wait" (there are "no reservations"), but "once you're seated" it's "loads of fun", since the "subterranean" space "feels like one big Italian dinner table."

**SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA RESTAURANTS**  
**2011**

# 2011

## MICHELIN GUIDE RECOMMENDED

### Tommaso's

Italian 

California pizza kitchens love to celebrate the bounty of the season, turning out pies with toppings that would boggle a red-blooded Italian (snow peas and sauerkraut?). Not so at Tommaso's, the family-friendly North Beach mainstay where the wood-fired pizzas hail straight from the old country. The chewy thin crust pies are heaped with sausage, meatballs, salami, and Prosciutto di Parma. Fancy pants can sample garlic and clams or chicken and artichoke.

Set against a bright mural depicting the Bay of Naples, dinners at Tommaso's might also include a meaty antipasto plate loaded with rosemary ham and *bresaola*, or classic tiramisu. A fixture in the neighborhood since 1935, this fortress is a refreshing escape from seedy North Beach nightlife.



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## TOMMASO'S RISTORANTE ITALIANO

Old-school Neapolitan pizza & pasta

[Italian](#) · [North Beach](#) · [\\$\\$](#)



### THE ZAGAT REVIEW

4.5

FOOD

3.8

DECOR

4.3

SERVICE

**“Long before”** there was a pizzeria **“on every corner”**, this **“old-school”** North Beach Italian **“institution”** was firing up pies out of its **“original wood-burning oven”**; it's **“not showy”**, just a **“charmingly downscale”** spot doling out Neapolitan **“comfort food”** at a **“dockworker's price”** by folks who **“make you feel like family”** – but **“expect to wait”** because there are **“no reservations.”**

Tommaso's 2017 Zagat Review