



Legacy Business Registry Staff Report

Hearing Date: December 11, 2023

HEROES CLUB, INC.

Application No.: LBR-2023-24-008
Business Name: Heroes Club, Inc.
Business Address: 840 Clement St.
District: District 1
Applicant: Robin Kwok, Manager
Nomination Date: October 17, 2023
Nominated By: Supervisor Connie Chan
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Heroes Club, Inc. is the only shop in San Francisco that specializes in Asian nostalgic science fiction and anime fine art collectible toys. Many pieces date from the 1960s to the 1990s and include out-of-print vintage model kits. The business was founded by Robin Kwok in 1989 at the current location in the Richmond neighborhood. Robin graduated from the prestigious Academy of Art University of San Francisco with a bachelor's degree in fine arts.

Robin is a talented artist who was born with creativity and artistic skills, and he has been custom building, sculpting, and painting model kits for several decades. His natural ability in building and airbrush paintings in detail is internationally recognized. He enjoys the challenge of building and painting complex raw sculptures and custom-building art pieces at the client's request. His expertise extends into action figures, models, and other collectibles.

Heroes Club has become the go-to destination for collectors and celebrities alike, recognized for the unique and high-quality craftsmanship that goes into customizing each piece. Heroes Club, Inc. was also Robin Williams' favorite store, and other famous clients include Nicholas Cage, Godzilla director Koichi Kawakita, director/producer Guillermo del Toro, and Michael Jackson.

CRITERION 1

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

Yes, Heroes Club, Inc. has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years:

840 Clement St. from 1989 to Present (34 years)

CRITERION 2

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

Yes, Heroes Club, Inc. has contributed to the history and identity of the Richmond neighborhood and San Francisco.

The Historic Preservation Commission recommended the applicant as qualifying, noting the following ways the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community:

Legacy Business Program

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





- The business is associated with Japanese collectible toys, models, and fine art statues. All pieces are unique and hand crafted.
- Clients of Heroes Club included the following:
 - Kirk Hammett of Metallica.
 - Actor Nicholas Cage.
 - Director/producer Guillermo del Toro.
 - Godzilla Director Koichi Kawakita.
 - Michael Jackson.
 - Robin Williams. Heroes Club Inc. was Robin Williams' favorite store as shown in the book "Robin Williams: A Singular Portrait, 1986-2002" by Arthur Grace. The book features a picture of Mr. Williams shopping at Heroes Club.
- There have been a number of features and articles on Heroes Club. The business has been referenced as an iconic toys and collectible store in SFGATE, National Geographic, The San Francisco Chronicle, CNN, and KTSF 26 News.
- In 2002, Heroes Club Inc. won a "Best of San Francisco" award from SF Weekly for the "Best Place to Find an Intergalactic Police Force."
- Heroes Club is a woman-owned business as of 2019 when Robin Kwok transferred it to his wife Yee Mei Wong. Robin remains the main artist. As the only shop in the city that specializes in Asian nostalgic science fiction and anime fine art collectible toys, it plays an important role for the Asian-American community in San Francisco introducing and preserving anime culture for the community.

CRITERION 3

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

Yes, Heroes Club, Inc. is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that Heroes Club, Inc. qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) and recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Store specializing in Asian nostalgic science fiction and anime fine art collectible toys.

CORE PHYSICAL FEATURE OR TRADITION THAT DEFINES THE BUSINESS

Following is the core physical feature or tradition that defines the business that would be required for maintenance of the business on the Legacy Business Registry.

- Collectibles store.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Small Business Commission include Heroes Club, Inc. currently located at 840 Clement St. in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
Legacy Business Program

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Small Business Commission

Resolution No. _____

December 11, 2023

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Adopting findings approving the Legacy Business Registry application for Heroes Club, Inc., currently located at 840 Clement St.

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; or

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for more than 20 years but less than 30 years, has had no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years, has significantly contributed to the history or identity of a particular neighborhood or community and, if not included on the Registry, faces a significant risk of displacement; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has contributed to the 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 December 11, 2023, the San Francisco Small Business Commission reviewed documents and correspondence, and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry application; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission hereby includes Heroes Club, Inc. in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission recommends safeguarding the below listed physical features and traditions at Heroes Club, Inc.

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Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Store specializing in Asian nostalgic science fiction and anime fine art collectible toys.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission requires maintenance of the below listed core physical feature or tradition to maintain Heroes Club, Inc. on the Legacy Business Registry:

- Collectibles store.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Small Business Commission on December 11, 2023.

Katy Tang
Director

RESOLUTION NO. _____

Ayes –
Nays –
Abstained –
Absent –

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Legacy Business Registry

Application Review Sheet

Application No.: LBR-2023-24-008
Business Name: Heroes Club, Inc.
Business Address: 840 Clement St.
District: District 1
Applicant: Robin Kwok, Manager
Nomination Date: October 17, 2023
Nominated By: Supervisor Connie Chan

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

840 Clement St. from 1989 to Present (34 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 18, 2023

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
Legacy Business Program

Legacy Business Program

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Member, Board of Supervisors
District 1



City and County of San Francisco

CONNIE CHAN

陳詩敏

第一區市參事

October 17, 2023

Dear Director Tang,

I am pleased to nominate **Heroes Club Inc.** to the San Francisco Legacy Business Registry, a business founded in 1989, located at 840 Clement Street.

Heroes Club is the only shop in San Francisco that specializes in Asian nostalgic science fiction and anime fine art collectible toys, many from the 1960s to the 1990s, and out-of-print vintage and collectible model kits. It provides a blast-to-the-past that transports anime fans and science fiction enthusiasts alike to a time and place that evokes nostalgia. Being the only shop in San Francisco that specializes in Asian nostalgic science fiction and anime fine art collectibles also highlights the important role Heroes Club plays in introducing and preserving anime culture for the community.

Heroes Club has action figures and models for everyone's inner child, or for the serious enthusiasts, the business will assemble, paint, or build from scratch any model or action figure you can imagine. Heroes Club became the go-to destination for collectors and celebrities alike, recognized for the unique and high-quality craftsmanship that goes into customizing each piece. Heroes Club was also Robin Williams' favorite store, and other famous clients include Nicholas Cage and Godzilla director Koichi Kawakita, among others.

Founded in 1989, Robin Kwok has shared his talent, artistry and passion for anime and science fiction with the community; and we are fortunate that the store has continued to carry on as a local treasure through Yee Mei Wong's ownership of the business since 2019. It is important that we support and sustain spaces like Heroes Club Inc. so that generations of San Franciscans can continue to discover, and rediscover, their love for revered collectible toys.

It is my profound honor to nominate Heroes Club Inc. for inclusion in the Legacy Business Registry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Connie Chan".

Connie Chan
District 1 Supervisor



Legacy Business Registry Application



Business Information

Business name: Heroes Club, Inc.

Business owner name(s): Yee Mei Wong

Identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business

Current business address: 840 Clement St., San Francisco, CA 94118

Telephone: (415) 387 – 4552 **Email:** infoartoftoy@yahoo.com

Mailing address (if different than above):

Website: https://www.solidart.club/

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/SolidArtClub/ **Twitter:** https://twitter.com/solidartclub

7-digit San Francisco Business Account Number (BAN): 0 3 4 9 8 0 4

Do any of these describe your business? (select all that apply)
Requires at least 51% of the business be owned, operated, and controlled by the business designation below.

- Immigrant-Owned Business
- LGBTQ+-Owned Business
- Minority-Owned Business*
- Owned by Person with a Disability
- Veteran-Owned Business
- Woman-Owned Business

**Minority is defined as one or more of the following racial or ethnic groups: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Hispanic or Latino; Middle Eastern or North African; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander*

Contact Person Information

Contact person name: Robin Kwok

Contact person title: Manager

Contact telephone: (415) 387 – 4552 **Contact email:** infoartoftoy@yahoo.com

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.

Original San Francisco address: **Zip Code:**

Is this location the founding location of the business? (Y/N):

Dates at this location: **From:** **To:**

Other address (if applicable): **Zip Code:**

Dates at this location: **From:** **To:**

Other address (if applicable): **Zip Code:**

Dates at this location: **From:** **To:**

Other address (if applicable): **Zip Code:**

Dates at this location: **From:** **To:**

Other Address (if applicable): **Zip Code:**

Dates at this location: **From:** **To:**

Other address (if applicable): **Zip Code:**

Dates at this location: **From:** **To:**

Applicant Disclosures

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

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

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

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

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

Name:

YEE MEI WONG

Signature:



Date:

Jun, 29, 2023

HEROES CLUB INC.

Written Historical Narrative

INTRODUCTION

a. Describe the business. What does it sell or provide?

Heroes Club sells collectible toys, models, and fine art statues. Many are nostalgic Japanese science fiction and animated characters from the 1960s to the 1990s, mainly out-of-print vintage and collectibles model kits. Some are toys. All pieces are unique and handcrafted. Each high-quality, limited-edition fine art collectible requires an incredible amount of time in designing, modeling, painting, and casting.

b. Describe whom the business serves.

Customers of the business are collectors, as well as science fiction and anime fans. Heroes Club sells globally.

c. In about 2-5 words (15-30 characters), describe what the business is known for.

Collectible toys, models, and fine art statues.

CRITERION 1: The business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years.

a. Provide a short history of the business, including locations and owners.

Heroes Club was founded by Robin Kwok in 1989 at 840 Clement Street in the Richmond District.

Robin graduated from the prestigious Academy of Art University of San Francisco with a bachelor's degree in fine arts. He caters to modelers and collectors of horror, science-fiction, and fantasy-related collectibles. Robin's expertise extends into action figures, models, and other collectibles. Robin is a talented artist who was born with creativity and artistic skills, and he has been custom building, sculpting, and painting model kits for several decades. His natural ability in building and airbrush paintings in detail is internationally recognized. He enjoys the challenge of building and painting complex raw sculptures and custom-building art pieces at the client's request.

Over the years, Heroes Club Inc. adopted other names for its internet presence because the "Heroes Club" name was already being used as a website domain and in social media. "Art Of

Toys” and/or “Solid Art Club” are used for the business website, YouTube channel, Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), among other places. Heroes Club Inc. does not currently have fictitious business names on record for “Art Of Toys” or “Solid Art Club.”

In 1989, Robin Kwok transferred the business to his wife Yee Mei Wong. For personal reasons, Robin needed to spend more time at home, so he let his wife take charge of the business. Robin remains the main artist at Heroes Club Inc.

b. Provide the ownership history of the business in a consolidated year-to-year format.

1989 to 2019: Robin Kwok
2019 to Present: Yee Mei Wong

c. Describe any circumstances that required the business to cease operations in San Francisco for any significant length of time.

The storefront of Heroes Club was closed during the COVID-19 pandemic for approximately two years beginning March 2020. The business was open for online ordering only during that time.

CRITERION 2: The business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community

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

Heroes Club Inc. contributes to the history and identity of the business sector and San Francisco as the only shop in the city that specializes in Asian nostalgic science fiction and anime fine art collectible toys.

b. Is the business associated with significant people or events, either now or in the past?

Clients of Heroes Club included the following: Kirk Hammett of Metallica; actor Nicholas Cage; director/producer Guillermo del Toro; Godzilla Director Koichi Kawakita; the late Michael Jackson; and the late Robin Williams.

Heroes Club Inc. was Robin Williams’ favorite store as shown in the book “Robin Williams: A Singular Portrait, 1986-2002” by Arthur Grace. The book features a picture of Mr. Williams shopping at Heroes Club. (<https://www.counterpointpress.com/books/robin-williams/>).

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

Not applicable.

d. Has the business ever been referenced in the media, business trade publication, and/or historical documents?

Heroes Club has been referenced as an iconic toys and collectible store in SFGATE, National Geographic, The San Francisco Chronicle, CNN, and KTSF 26 News. Following are notable media references:

- “The Making Of Nosferatu Life-Size Bust Renewal Version 2023”
YouTube
September 1, 2023
<https://youtu.be/ilmQklOlehY?si=eaYT058XaNKLsgT4>
- “The last toy shop in San Francisco, where Robin Williams was a regular”
SFGATE
Aug 21, 2019
<https://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/The-last-toy-shop-in-San-Francisco-Robin-Williams-14364944.php>
- “Robin Williams, as only a friend could see him”
CNN
August 11, 2016
<https://www.cnn.com/2016/08/11/entertainment/gallery/tbt-robin-williams-arthur-grace/index.html>
- “On Foot San Francisco: The Inner Richmond”
National Geographic Magazine
July/August 2006

e. Has the business ever received any awards, recognition, or political commendations?

In 2002, Heroes Club Inc. won a “Best of San Francisco” award from SF Weekly for the “Best Place to Find an Intergalactic Police Force.” Following was a description of the business:

“Here, superheroes, villains, and monsters are revered as art and stored behind glass -- everything from Ultraman to Hanuman to Optimus Prime to Frankenstein (if you don't see it at the shop, or on the Web site, it probably doesn't exist anymore). But while collecting models and action figures is a very serious hobby, there's no way to deny that the store itself is just a very well-organized toy box. Thankfully, the shop's mirthful proprietor will encourage your vision of a grand battle between the foot-tall Kekko Kamen and Davy, Micky, and Mike of the Monkees; he'll indulge your death match between George Lucas and San Francisco Police Chief Fred Lau; and cheer you on as the Green Berets bring an Osama bin Laden action figure to its knees. For the more serious-minded enthusiast, of course, the Heroes Club Workshop will assemble, paint, or build from scratch any model or action figure you can imagine. And this is one of the few stores in the Bay Area that will appraise vintage Japanese toys and collectibles.”

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

If Heroes Club were to close, there would no longer be any stores of this type in San Francisco. This is the last fine arts collectible toys and hobby store in the city.

CRITERION 3: The business is committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business

a. Is the business associated with a culturally significant building, structure, object, signage, mural, architectural detail, neon sign, or any other special physical feature that defines the business?

Not applicable.

b. In a few words, describe the main business activity you commit to maintaining.

Heroes Club is committed to maintaining its business model as a store selling toys and fine art collectibles.

c. What challenges is the business facing today?

High crime rates and homeless issues have been discouraging walk-in customers. In 2020, the business was the victim of a break-in. Then mail theft became a problem. In 2023, there was a smash-and-grab and a robbery. All criminal activity was reported to the San Francisco Police Department with crystal-clear security camera videos. However, the police have made no arrests. Crime continues to escalate in the neighborhood.

Legacy Business Program staff will add the following details:

a. Features or traditions that define the business and should be maintained for the business to remain on the Legacy Business Registry.

Toy and collectibles store.

b. 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 Planning Department Historic Resource Status of the building at 820-826 Clement Street is "B - Unknown / Age Eligible."



大興 CD雜誌精品店
TAI HING BOOK & GIFT
848 Clement St. Tel: 415-380-2112
本店經營：流行CD 時代雜誌 各類精巧禮品

愛麗餅屋
BAKERY
415-876-2727

愛麗餅屋
CHERRY BLOSSOM BAKERY

Heroes Club
The Art of Toys
www.artoftoy.com

lime tree
Indonesian-Singaporean Kitchen
415-431-8811

J Phoenix
832 Clement St. 415-377-4551

新春大吉

lime tree

J Phoenix

J Phoenix



Heroes Club
The Art of Toys
www.artoftoy.com

英雄會館

840

HEROES CLUB

Singapore

Singapore
Malaya
REST
4



英確會館 逸石







#artoftoys



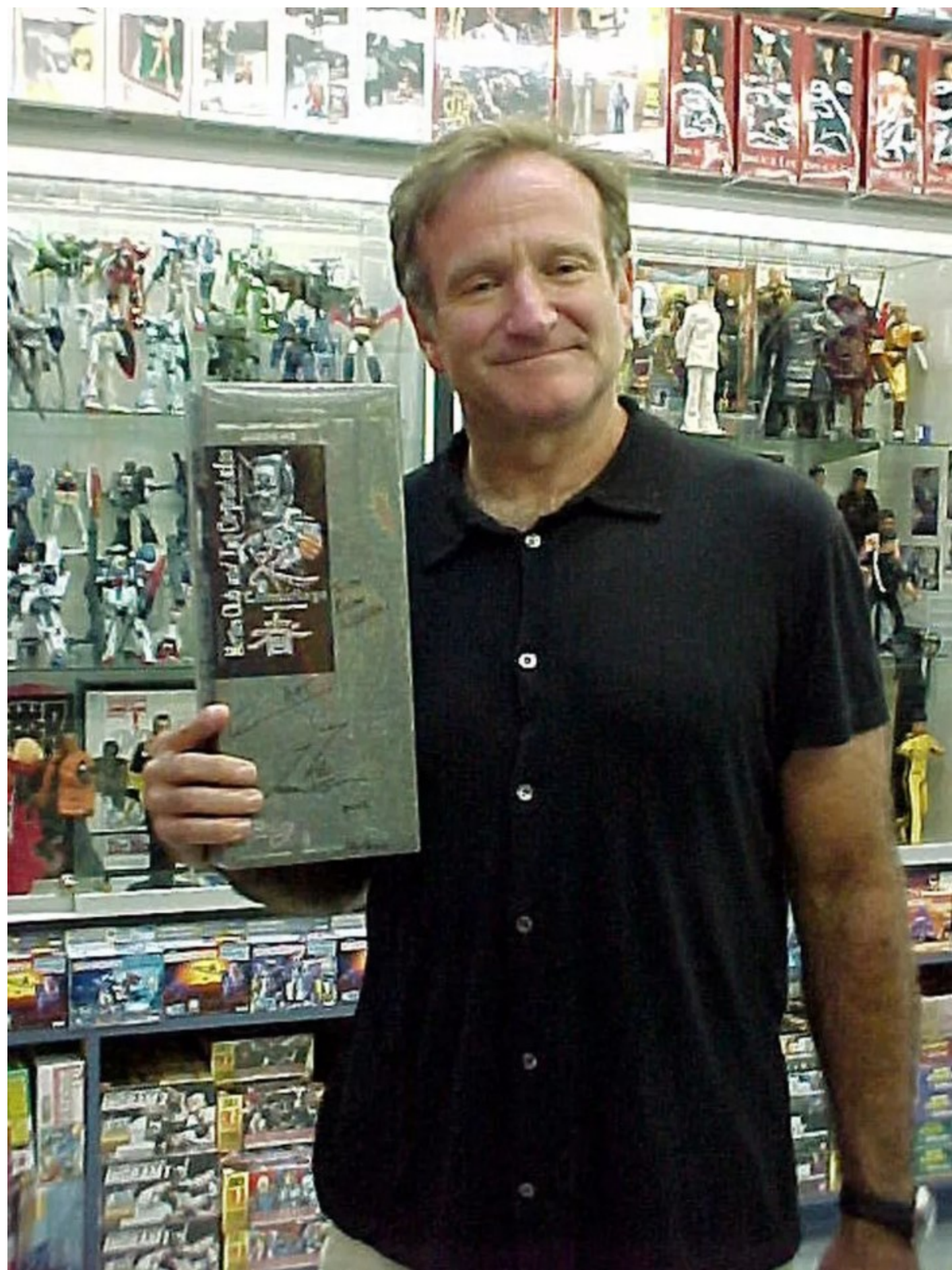
#heroesclub

Solid Art. Club

香港人
反抗!

X-ACTO
MINIATURE RASPS
For Wood and Plastic

XF-2



Plus!

Boyd Matson on Kilimanjaro

Cruise Ship Safety

Way Off-Broadway

18th Annual Photo Contest

Strange Planet



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

GLOBAL WARMING
YOUR VACATION MAY NEVER BE THE SAME

TRAVELER

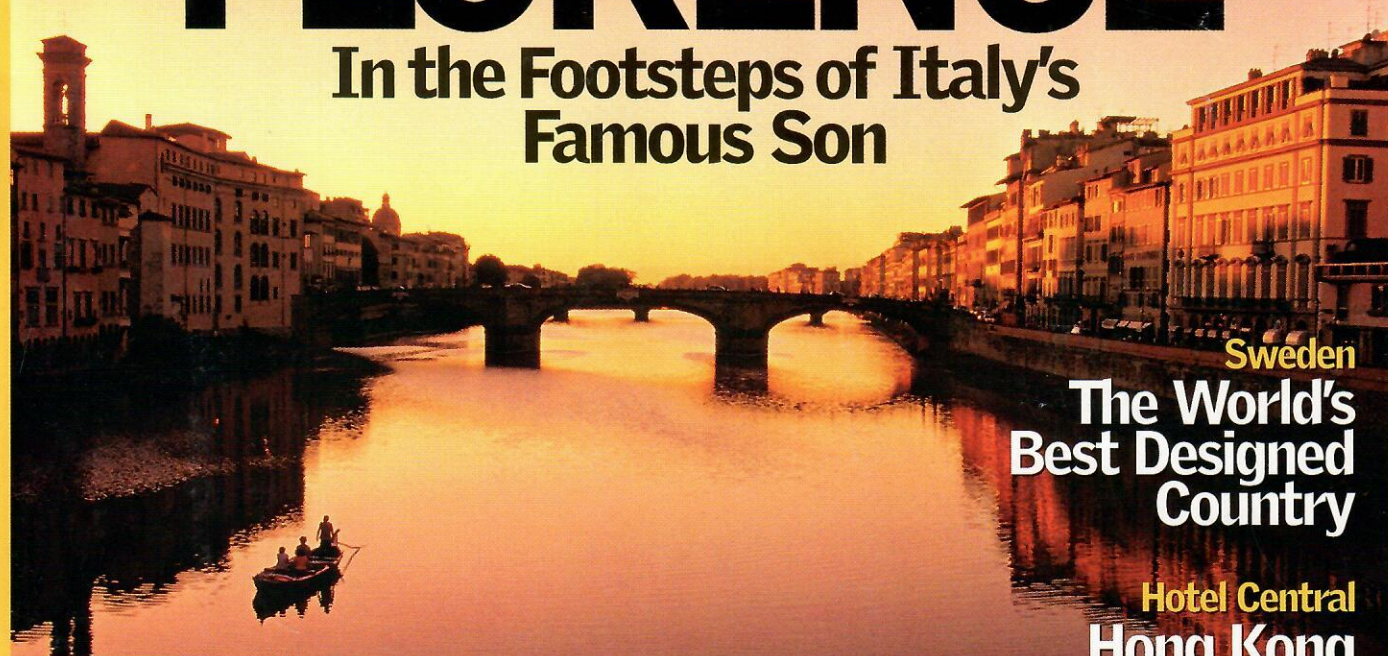
All travel, All the time

July/August 2006 \$4.95

Michelangelo's

FLORENCE

In the Footsteps of Italy's Famous Son



Sweden

The World's Best Designed Country

Hotel Central

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Istanbul

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200

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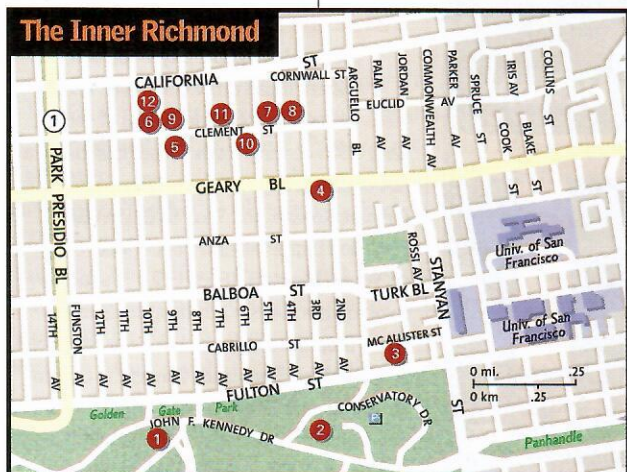
\$4.95US \$6.95CAN

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» WALKING GUIDE TO SAN FRANCISCO



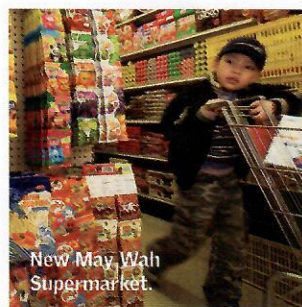
hops. Here you'll find Chinese markets like the **(5) Richmond New May Wah Supermarket** (707-719 Clement St.; 221-9826) stocked with exotic food such as dried chrysanthemums and fungi. But it's not just China that's represented on Clement; all of Asia's cuisine is offered in the modest restaurants serving cuisines from Java to Vietnam. Three to try:

chicken clay pot with bamboo shoots. Dessert might mean a trip to the San Francisco institution **(9) See's Candies** (754 Clement St.; 752-0953) for a piece of fresh milk chocolate or a visit to **(10) Toy Boat Dessert Cafe** (401 Clement St.; 751-7505) for their signature Affogato Float—a big scoop of French vanilla ice cream drowning in fresh espresso and crowned with homemade whipped cream. After you fill



Browsing at Green Apple.

(6) The Singapore Malaysian Restaurant (836 Clement St.; 750-9518) for the fusion of Indonesian, Malay, and Chinese dishes. **(7) King of Thai Noodle House** (346 Clement St.; 831-9953) is cheap, tasty, and spicy. A local favorite is the green curry. Vietnamese food at **(8) Minh's Garden** (208 Clement St.; 751-8211) is as authentic as that found in Saigon markets. Try the



New May Wah Supermarket.

your stomach, fill your mind at **(11) Green Apple** (506 Clement St.; 387-2272) a new and used bookstore and local literary mecca. DVDs, CDs, and other media are available at their annex at 520 Clement. Toy and pop culture lovers should make sure to stop by Robin Kwok's **(12) Heroes Club** (840 Clement St.; 387-4552) for its marvelous collection of Japanese action figures. Kwok's collection includes manga figurines, the cast of *Planet of the Apes*, and Spidey. Keep a look out for the accordion player at 8th and Clement. He arrives in late afternoon, serenading passersby with Irish melodies. The songs sound a tad off-key, but they've got heart—just like the Richmond.

BUS STOPS: 38 Geary, 1 California

Spicy Mix of the Mission

A dense cluster of Victorian houses and revamped tenements, the Mission is where working-class Latinos rub shoulders with exuberant bohemians on the neighborhood's grungy but energized streets. Both groups find creative expression in the Mission's trademark colorful murals painted along streets and alleys. The nonprofit organization **(13) Precita Eyes** (2981 24th St.; 285-2287) offers tours of the most eye-catching.

Wake yourself up with morning buns and lattes at the popular corner bakery **(14) Tartine** (600 Guerrero St.; 487-2600). The small bakery is constantly entered on the "best of" lists for its pastries and baked goods. Along palm-shaded Dolores Street, visit the neighborhood's historic namesake: **(15) Mission Dolores** (3321 16th St.; 621-8203). Officially Mission San Francisco de Asís, the church is named for St. Francis of Assisi, the city's patron saint. Built in the late 1700s, the whitewashed mission is considered the city's oldest building. To the east, on 16th Street's southern side, are two unique art galleries: **(16) Creativity Explored** (3245 16th St.; 863-2108), which sells work by mentally challenged adults, and the **(17) Artist-Xchange** (3169 16th St.; 864-1490), a collaborative space where emerging Bay Area artists can sell their paintings and sculptures. On Valencia Street, you'll see an array of home-furnishing stores. Some offer ultramodern pieces like those at **(18) Architectural Elements** (573 Valencia St.; 252-8370). Others are scruffy and well-worn like the beloved **(19) Community Thrift** (623 Valencia St.; 861-4910), where \$15 should bring you a secondhand treasure. The **(20) Apartment**



Friends gather at Rohan Lounge for drinks and tapas.

Entertainment

Robin Williams, as only a friend could see him

Updated 9:09 AM EDT, Thu August 11, 2016



10 of 13

Arthur Grace/Contact Press Images

The entertainer visits one of his favorite toy stores, Heroes Club, in San Francisco in 1993.



<https://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/The-last-toy-shop-in-San-Francisco-Robin-Williams-14364944.php>

SFGATE

[ENTERTAINMENT](#)

The last toy shop in San Francisco, where Robin Williams was a regular

By [Dan Gentile](#), SFGate

Aug 21, 2019



Robin Kwok and Robin Williams pose with a custom model from "The Man Who Laughs."

Robin Kwok

Robin Kwok may look like an unassuming shop owner, but he's actually humanity's best hope for destroying Godzilla.

Safely locked behind glass in the back corner of the Heroes Club, Kwok watches over the Oxygen Destroyer, an ultimate weapon that's 2 feet long and looks like the silver core of a reactor. Back in 1954, it was the only way to kill the original Godzilla. Only five of these life-like reproductions were ever made. This one sells for \$13,998.

"For die-hard Godzilla fans, this is the holy grail," says Kwok.

Kwok, 54, has run the Heroes Club on Clement Street since 1990, after three years in a previous location. Technically, it could be called a toy shop, as it does sell some cheap \$10 Godzilla figures, but the dozens of hand-painted stormtroopers, zombies and monsters lining the walls are closer to fine art than playthings.



Robin Kwok alongside some of his favorite works.

Blair Heagerty / SFGate



"The Man Who Laughs" served as the inspiration for the Joker in Batman. Robin Kwok built an original sculpture of a character from the film for his close friend Robbin Williams.
Blair Heagerty / SFGate

Kwok builds and paints most of the models in a cramped workshop in the back of the store. Tiny paint bottles and half-finished models lay everywhere, including a 4-foot-long prop spaceship from Disney's Space Mountain, complete with dangling fiber optic cables. His tools haven't changed much since his studies at the San Francisco Academy of Art, the highest tech in his workspace is an old airbrush. He makes some models from scratch, others he assembles from limited edition resin kits. Each sculpture takes months to finish and sells for hundreds of dollars.

These days, 80 percent of his buyers are collectors from other countries, but there was one particular San Francisco local who was a big fan: the late Robin Williams.

"I met Mr. Williams in '87, when I first opened. Over time, we became friends. He lived close by to the shop, on Lake Street, so he would come here in his spare time," says Kwok. The pair bonded while they were both going through divorces, and kept in touch over the years, speaking on the phone on the day before

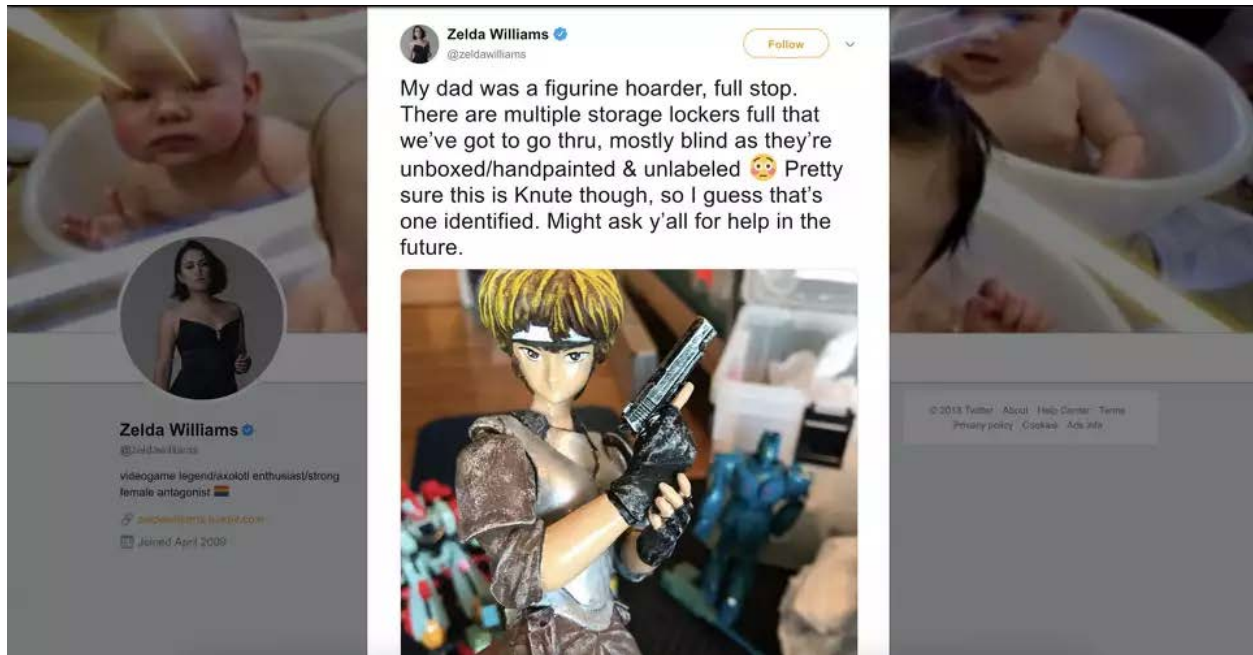
Williams' death. Kwok keeps a pristine binder of memories from their relationship, including personal letters, magazine clippings featuring photos of Williams in the shop, and a signed receipt for a \$1,200 purchase (see photos of them above in the slideshow).

While most of Kwok's work revolves around iconic sci-fi and horror franchises, Williams was more interested in Asian characters and military figures. In a 2018 Sotheby's auction of his possessions, a large-scale model tank sold for \$875. In a series of now-deleted Twitter posts, his daughter Zelda asked fans for help identifying some parts of his collection, which she said included thousands of figurines.

As a housewarming gift, Kwok crafted Williams an original piece inspired by the 1928 film, "The Man Who Laughs." The film is obscure, but the character is immediately recognizable. Sitting on an antique chair, he wears a tattered pink and orange suit, white face paint, and a macabre red lipstick smile while holding a shotgun. It's clearly the early inspiration for the Batman villain the Joker.



The interior of Heroes Club.
Blair Heagerty / SFGate



Zelda Williams tweets about her late father's toy collection on May 15, 2018. Zelda Williams, via Twitter

Although the shop does have other celebrity clients (Nicolas Cage, Kirk Hammett of Metallica, Guillermo del Toro) and a healthy stream of walk-in window shoppers, today most of their sales take place online. To adjust to the shifting retail landscape, Heroes Club built a strong web presence, including a YouTube channel called [Art of Toys](#) that shows the meticulous detailing in pieces like Peach Blossom Island. Each eyelash on the woman's face was painted and attached individually, a grueling task that took five hours.

Adapting to changing tastes has also been a challenge for the shop. Customers enjoy characters from contemporary video games, and many franchises, like Alien, continue to produce films, but most of the stock showcases vintage properties. Kwok chalks this up to more than just nostalgia, but a change in movie-making style.

"The new 'Avengers' is visually entertaining, but once you walk out of the theater, you probably forget what it was about. In an older movie like 'Exorcist,' they don't have much budget or CG graphics, so the director has to spend more time to create the atmosphere. Those details imprint in your memory," he says.

An example of that concept hangs near the entrance to the shop: a screaming face from the "Exorcist" that only flashed across the screen for one second, but still haunts fans to this day. It's these types of details that excite Kwok the most —

obscure references with such resonance they deserve to be re-created by a craftsman who'll spend hours just airbrushing eyelashes.

As for the future of the shop, Kwok admits business isn't what it used to be. He's not officially the last toy shop in San Francisco, but laments the fact that most of the others have closed. Still, he's not discouraged, and plans to continue honing his craft in the studio every day.

"I'll retire the day I can't paint anymore," he says.

Click through the slideshow for more photos of stormtrooper sculptures, the artist's workshop and a personal letter from Robin Williams

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By [Dan Gentile](#)

Dan Gentile is the culture editor at SFGATE. He moved to San Francisco from Austin, TX where he worked as a vinyl DJ and freelance writer covering food and music. His writing has been featured in Texas Monthly, American Way, Rolling Stone, Roads & Kingdoms, VICE, Thrillist and more. Email: Dan.Gentile@sfgate.com.



HEROES CLUB

Winner

**BEST PLACE TO FIND AN
INTERGALACTIC POLICE FORCE**



Best of
SAN FRANCISCO

2002



From sfweekly.com

Originally published by *SF Weekly* May 15, 2002

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Best Place to Find an Intergalactic Police Force Heroes Club

Here, superheroes, villains, and monsters are revered as art and stored behind glass -- everything from Ultraman to Hanuman to Optimus Prime to Frankenstein (if you don't see it at the shop, or on the Web site, it probably doesn't exist anymore). But while collecting models and action figures is a very serious hobby, there's no way to deny that the store itself is just a very well-organized toy box. Thankfully, the shop's mirthful proprietor will encourage your vision of a grand battle between the foot-tall Kekko Kamen and Davy, Micky, and Mike of the Monkees; he'll indulge your death match between George Lucas and San Francisco Police Chief Fred Lau; and cheer you on as the Green Berets bring an Osama bin Laden action figure to its knees. For the more serious-minded enthusiast, of course, the Heroes Club Workshop will assemble, paint, or build from scratch any model or action figure you can imagine. And this is one of the few stores in the Bay Area that will appraise vintage Japanese toys and collectibles.

Details

Address: 840 Clement (near Ninth Avenue), 387-4552, <http://shop.store.yahoo.com/artoftoy/>



LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HEARING DATE: NOVEMBER 15, 2023

Filing Date: 10/18/2023
Case No.: 2023-009852LBR
Business Name: Heroes Club
Business Address: 840 Clement Street
Zoning: NCD – Inner Clement Street (Neighborhood Commercial) Zoning District
 40-X Height and Bulk District
Cultural District: Not Applicable
Block/Lot: 1424/020
Applicant: Robin Kwok
 840 Clement Street
Nominated By: Supervisor Connie Chan
Located In: District 1
Staff Contact: Will McCallum - 628-652-7338
 Will.Mccallum@sfgov.org

Recommendation: Adopt a Resolution to Recommend Approval

Business Description

Heroes Club is the only shop in San Francisco that specializes in Asian nostalgic science fiction and anime fine art collectible toys. Many pieces date from the 1960s to the 1990s and include out-of-print vintage model kits. The business was founded by Robin Kwok in 1989, at the current location in the Richmond neighborhood. Robin graduated from the prestigious Academy of Art University of San Francisco with a bachelor’s degree in fine arts. Robin is a talented artist who was born with creativity and artistic skills, and he has been custom building, sculpting, and painting model kits for several decades. His natural ability in building and airbrush paintings in detail is internationally recognized. He enjoys the challenge of building and painting complex raw sculptures and custom-building art pieces at the client’s request. His expertise extends into action figures, models, and other collectibles.

Heroes Club has become the go-to destination for collectors and celebrities alike, recognized for the unique and high-quality craftsmanship that goes into customizing each piece. Heroes Club was also Robin Williams’ favorite

store, and other famous clients include Nicholas Cage, Godzilla director Koichi Kawakita, director/producer Guillermo del Toro, and Michael Jackson.

The business's location at 840 Clement is a Category B (Unknown / Age Eligible) structure on the north side of Clement Street between 9th and 10th Avenues in the Richmond neighborhood. It is within the NCD Inner Clement Street Neighborhood Commercial Zoning District and a 40-X Height and Bulk District. It was included in several survey areas, including the Neighborhood Commercial Corridors Survey (2015), where it received a rating of "does not appear significant under Criterion C/3(Architecture and Design), and the Foundation for San Francisco Architectural Heritage Survey (1978), where it was identified as NR (Not Rated). However, despite these former evaluations, none have been conclusive, and the property maintains a Planning Department status code of "B" (Unknown / Age Eligible).

Staff Analysis

Review Criteria

1. When was business founded?

The business was founded in 1989.

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

Yes. Heroes Club qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- a. Heroes Club has operated continuously in San Francisco for 34 years.
- b. Heroes Club has contributed to the history and identity of the Richmond neighborhood and San Francisco.
- c. Heroes Club is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the organization.

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

Yes. The business is associated with Japanese collectible toys, models, and fine art statues. All pieces are unique and hand crafted.

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

Clients of Heroes Club included the following: Kirk Hammett of Metallica; actor Nicholas Cage; director/producer Guillermo del Toro; Godzilla Director Koichi Kawakita; the late Michael Jackson; and the late Robin Williams. Heroes Club Inc. was Robin Williams' favorite store as shown in the book "Robin Williams: A Singular Portrait, 1986-2002" by Arthur Grace. The book features a picture of Mr. Williams shopping at Heroes Club.

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

No.

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

No, not as of the date of this Executive Summary.

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

Yes. There have been a number of features and articles on Heroes Club. Heroes Club has been referenced as an iconic toys and collectible store in SFGATE, National Geographic, The San Francisco Chronicle, CNN, and KTSF 26 News. In 2002, Heroes Club Inc. won a “Best of San Francisco” award from SF Weekly for the “Best Place to Find an Intergalactic Police Force.”

Racial and Social Equity Analysis

On July 15th, 2020 the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission adopted [Resolution No. 1127](#) centering Preservation Planning on racial and social equity. Understanding the benefits, burdens, and opportunities to advance racial and social equity that proposed Preservation Planning documents provide is part of the Department’s Racial and Social Equity Initiative. This is also consistent with the Mayor’s Citywide Strategic Initiatives for equity and accountability and with the Office of Racial Equity, which required all Departments to conduct this analysis.

The Legacy Business Program is deeply intertwined with these goals. One of the primary purposes of the Legacy Business Program is to maintain San Francisco’s cultural fabric and to foster civic engagement and pride by assisting long-operating businesses remain in the city. The Legacy Business Registry was established to recognize longstanding, community-serving businesses that are valuable cultural assets of the city. These businesses, ranging from restaurants to art galleries to tire shops to community shelters, are key to sustaining the racial and social diversity in San Francisco and adding to the identity and character of our city and the many communities within it.

Heroes Club is a woman-owned business as of 2019 when Robin Kwok transferred it to his wife Yee Mei Wong. Robin remains the main artist. As the only shop in the city that specializes in Asian nostalgic science fiction and anime fine art collectible toys, it plays an important role for the Asian-American community in San Francisco introducing and preserving anime culture for the community.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business

Location(s) associated with the business:

Current Locations:

- 840 Clement Street (1989 – Present)

Recommended by Applicant

- Store specializing in Asian nostalgic science fiction and anime fine art collectible toys.

Additional Recommended by Staff

- None

Basis for Recommendation

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

ATTACHMENTS

Draft Resolution

Legacy Business Registry Application:

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



HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RESOLUTION NO. 1357

HEARING DATE: NOVEMBER 15, 2023

Case No.: 2023-009852LBR
Business Name: Heroes Club
Business Address: 840 Clement Street
Zoning: NCD – Inner Clement Street (Neighborhood Commercial) Zoning District
40-X Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 1424/020
Applicant: Robin Kwok
840 Clement Street
Nominated By: Supervisor Connie Chan
Located In: District 1
Staff Contact: Will McCallum - 628-652-7338
Will.Mccallum@sfgov.org

ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR HEROES CLUB CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 840 CLEMENT STREET, BLOCK/LOT 1424/020.

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, at a duly noticed public hearing held on NOVEMBER 15, 2023, 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 Heroes Club qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) as it has operated for 30 or more years and has continued to contribute to the community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions for Heroes Club.

Locations(s):

Current Locations:

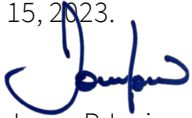
- 840 Clement Street (1989 – Present)

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Store specializing in Asian nostalgic science fiction and anime fine art collectible toys.

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

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby directs its Commission Secretary to transmit this Resolution and other pertinent materials in the case file to the Office of Small Business NOVEMBER 15, 2023.



Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

AYES: Campbell, Vergara, Wright, Foley, Nageswaran, Matsuda

NOES: None

ABSENT: None

ADOPTED: November 15, 2023