

Legacy Business Registry Staff Report

HEARING DATE NOVEMBER 12, 2019

LI PO LOUNGE

Application No.: LBR-2018-19-046
Business Name: Li Po Lounge
Business Address: 916 Grant Avenue
District: District 3
Applicant: Kenneth Lee, President
Nomination Date: March 18, 2019
Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

The Li Po Lounge ("Li Po") was established on February 10, 1937, on Chinese New Year's Eve as the first bar in Chinatown. It was named after Li Po, one of the greatest poets in China's Tang dynasty. It is a small and unpretentious place that has changed little since the 1930s. It features a wraparound bar with red leather booths, Chinese lanterns, a golden Buddha statue and pictures depicting the story of Li Po. Li Po Lounge is mentioned in numerous guidebooks as a place to visit when in San Francisco. Since 1997, the bar's trademarked Chinese Mai Tai has been one of its most popular drinks.

The original owners of the bar were Wilbert Wong and William Jack Chow. They were the owners from 1937 to 1967. Wilbert Wong initiated the idea of a public celebration for Chinese New Year in San Francisco in 1953 and organized the first Chinese New Year Festival and Parade. William Jack Chow was one of the country's first Chinese American lawyers and represented Chinese immigrants against federal immigration authorities. In addition to his law practice, he was actively involved in community and political activities and was widely known in the city.

From 1967 to 1997, ownership of the bar is unknown. From 1997 to 1999, Paul Lee and two partners owned Li Po Lounge. Little is known about them. In 1999, spouses Kenneth Lee and Yin Lan Fang Lee took over as owners of the bar. Kenneth was born in Burma and moved to China and eventually moved to the United States in 1981. He has been the sole owner of the bar since 2019.

The business is located on the east side of Grant Avenue between Washington and Jackson streets in the Chinatown neighborhood.

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





SAN FRANCISCO
OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
LONDON N. BREED, MAYOR

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS
REGINA DICK-ENDRIZZI, DIRECTOR

Yes, Li Po Lounge has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years:

916 Grant Avenue from 1937 to Present (82 years).

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

Yes, Li Po Lounge has contributed to the history and identity of the Chinatown 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:

- The property has a Planning Department Historic Resource status codes of "A" (Historic Resource Present) because of its location within the National-Register-eligible Chinatown Historic District. The property is a contributor to the National-Register-eligible Chinatown Historic District.
- The business is noted in the LGBTQ Historic Context Statement as a popular spot for LGBTQ people in the late 1930s.
- Li Po Lounge was recognized by the San Francisco Examiner in 2009 and was named one of the Top 10 Dive Bars in San Francisco in 2011 by SF Weekly. The bar has 4 out of 5 stars on Yelp. As recently as February 24, 2019, Li Po Lounge was mentioned in the San Francisco Chronicle in an article by Jonathan Kauffman on "The Glory of Old Bars."
- Li Po Lounge is recommended in the American Automobile Association (AAA) guidebook to San Francisco and is listed as a place to visit at the Chinatown Visitor Information Center at 625 Kearny Street. On May 8, 2019, Li Po Lounge was presented with a Small Business Award from Mayor London N. Breed in recognition of its small business success. Other awards of recognition for small business success:
 - San Francisco Board of Supervisors – Aaron Peskin, December 10, 2018.
 - United States House of Representatives – Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, May 8, 2019.
 - California State Senate – Scott Wiener, May 8, 2019.
 - California State Board of Equalization – Malia M. Cohen, May 8, 2019.
 - California State Assembly – Phil Ting, May 8, 2019.
 - Art Deco Society of California – Award for the preservation of the historical lantern, May 2018.

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

Yes, Li Po Lounge is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that Li Po Lounge 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.





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Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Neon lantern sign.
- The cavernous-looking, stone-clad entrance.
- The golden Buddha statue.
- The signature drink, the Chinese Mai Tai.

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.

- Bar.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Small Business Commission include Li Po Lounge currently located at 916 Grant Avenue in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

Richard Kurylo, Program Manager
Legacy Business Program



Small Business Commission Draft Resolution

HEARING DATE NOVEMBER 12, 2019

LI PO LOUNGE

LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY RESOLUTION NO. _____

Application No.: LBR-2018-19-046
Business Name: Li Po Lounge
Business Address: 916 Grant Avenue
District: District 3
Applicant: Kenneth Lee, President
Nomination Date: March 18, 2019
Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

ADOPTING FINDINGS APPROVING THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY APPLICATION FOR LI PO LOUNGE, CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 916 GRANT AVENUE.

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 in 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 November 12, 2019, the San Francisco Small Business Commission reviewed documents and correspondence, and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry application; therefore





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OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
LONDON N. BREED, MAYOR

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS
REGINA DICK-ENDRIZZI, DIRECTOR

BE IT RESOLVED that the Small Business Commission hereby includes Li Po Lounge 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 Li Po Lounge:

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Neon lantern sign.
• The cavernous-looking, stone-clad entrance.
• The golden Buddha statue.
• The signature drink, the Chinese Mai Tai.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Small Business Commission requires maintenance of the below listed core physical feature or tradition to maintain Li Po Lounge on the Legacy Business Registry:

- Bar.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Small Business Commission on November 12, 2019.

Regina Dick-Endrizzi
Director

RESOLUTION NO. _____

- Ayes -
Nays -
Abstained -
Absent -





SAN FRANCISCO

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
LONDON N. BREED, MAYOR

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS
REGINA DICK-ENDRIZZI, DIRECTOR

**Legacy
Business
Registry**

Application Review Sheet

Application No.: LBR-2018-19-046
Business Name: Li Po Lounge
Business Address: 916 Grant Avenue
District: District 3
Applicant: Kenneth Lee, President
Nomination Date: March 18, 2019
Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin

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

916 Grant Avenue from 1937 to Present (82 years).

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

CRITERION 3: Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms? Yes No

NOTES: N/A

DELIVERY DATE TO HPC: October 9, 2019

Richard Kurylo
Program Manager, Legacy Business Program



Member, Board of Supervisors
District 3



City and County of San Francisco

AARON PESKIN
佩斯金 市參事

March 18, 2019

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 Li Po Lounge for inclusion on the Legacy Business Registry.

Since 1937, Li Po Lounge has welcomed a wide range of people into its space, including its neighbors in the vibrant Chinatown community, and has been a refuge for sailors and members of the LGBT community since its inception. The bar is named after a Chinese poet known for his love of alcohol, and its famous Chinese Mai Tais have earned the vaunted endorsement of the late Anthony Bourdain. Li Po Lounge is well known for its unique culture and events and is often listed among San Francisco's top dive bars. Its historical Chinese lantern neon signage has been cited as the only 3-dimensional neon sign on the streets of San Francisco and as a San Francisco icon by neon sign historians. My office was happy to support and celebrate the restoration of that historic element.

I hope for Li Po Lounge's continued success and hereby recommend it for inclusion on the Legacy Business Registry.

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:		
LI PO LOUNGE		
BUSINESS OWNER(S) (identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business)		
KENNETH LEE		
CURRENT BUSINESS ADDRESS:		TELEPHONE:
916 Grant Ave		(415) 982-0072
San Francisco, CA 94108		EMAIL:
		lipolounge@yahoo.com
WEBSITE:	FACEBOOK PAGE:	YELP PAGE:
www.lipolounge.com	lipolounge	lipolounge
APPLICANT'S NAME		
KENNETH LEE / Jackie Cheung - manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Same as Business		
APPLICANT'S TITLE		
President		
APPLICANT'S ADDRESS:		TELEPHONE:
916 Grant Ave		[REDACTED]
San Francisco, CA 94108		EMAIL:
		[REDACTED]
SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS ACCOUNT NUMBER:		SECRETARY OF STATE ENTITY NUMBER (if applicable):
0305495		431-6956-4
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
916 Grant Avenue	94108	2/10/1937
IS THIS LOCATION THE FOUNDING LOCATION OF THE BUSINESS?	DATES OF OPERATION AT THIS LOCATON	
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	1937 to 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:
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OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
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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.

KENNETH LEE

Name (Print):

5/28/2019

Date:

Kenneth Lee

Signature:

LI PO LOUNGE

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.

The Li Po Lounge (“Li Po”) was established on February 10, 1937, on Chinese New Year's Eve. It is located at 916 Grant Avenue in San Francisco’s Chinatown. It was named after Li Po, one of the greatest poets in China’s Tang dynasty.

Li Po Lounge, the first bar in Chinatown, is a dive bar that is home to locals and an oddity enjoyed by visitors from all over the world. It is a small and unpretentious Chinatown bar that lies behind a set of double doors cut out of faux rocks with large red lacquered doors. Li Po Lounge has changed little since the 1930s. It features a wraparound bar with dingy red leather booths. Ubiquitous, traditional Chinese lanterns are hung for lighting and decoration. They have been there since 1937. Situated behind the bar is a golden Buddha statue that is not found in many other cocktail bars, if any. Also, walls are decorated with pictures depicting the story of Li Po the poet. Li Po Lounge is mentioned in numerous guidebooks as a place to visit when in San Francisco. Since 1997, the bar’s Chinese Mai Tai, a creation of this very bar, has been one of the most delicious and popular drinks in town. And since 2013, The Chinese Mai Tai is trademarked through the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

The original owners of the bar were Wilbert Wong and William Jack Chow. They were the owners from 1937 to 1967. Wilbert Wong initiated the idea of a public celebration for Chinese New Year in San Francisco in 1953 and organized the first Chinese New Year Festival and Parade. William Jack Chow was one of the country's first Chinese American lawyers and represented Chinese immigrants against federal immigration authorities. In addition to his law practice, he was actively involved in community and political activities and was widely known in the city.

From 1967 to 1997, ownership of the bar is unknown. From 1997 to 1999, Paul Lee and two partners owned Li Po Lounge. Little is known about them. In 1999, spouses Kenneth Lee and Yin Lan Fang Lee took over as owners of the bar. Kenneth was born in Burma and moved to China and eventually moved to the United States in 1981. He was a bartender at Red's Place for 15 years and Bow Bow Bar for six years. Kenneth has been the sole owner of the bar since 2019.

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

Li Po has never ceased operations in San Francisco since it was founded.

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

Li Po Lounge is not currently a family owned business since it is solely owned by Kenneth Lee. However, the bar has been family owned during periods when it was co-owned by relatives or spouses and staffed by family members.

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

The ownership history of Li Po Lounge is as follows:

1937 to 1967:	Wilbert Wong and William Jack Chow
1967 to 1997:	Unknown
1997 to 1999:	Paul Lee and two partners
1999 to 2018:	Kenneth Lee and Yin Lan Fang Lee
2019 to present:	Kenneth Lee

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

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

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

The historic resource status of the building of the building that houses Li Po Lounge is classified by the Planning Department as Category A, Historic Resource Present, with regard to the California Environmental Quality Act. The property is a contributor to the Chinatown Historic District and is listed with the California Register and the National Register.

CRITERION 2

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

Li Po Lounge was the first cocktail bar in Chinatown. It is located in the heart of Chinatown on Grant Avenue.

Li Po has one of the most iconic neon signs in San Francisco. It is included in the book *San Francisco Neon: Survivors and Lost Icons* by San Francisco neon historians and photographers Al Barna and Randall Ann Homan. "The imaginative design and excellent fabrication of the Li Po sign make it a classic example of the sign maker's art form," said Al Barna. "Its long association with Chinatown and Grant Avenue make it a San Francisco icon." Homan said it was the most unique neon she's seen. "Most Chinese lanterns are spherical shaped. This one is a hexagon. It has six sides." Barna and Homan operate a tour of neon lights in San Francisco; one of the stops on the tour is Li Po Lounge.

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

Li Po's neon lantern appears in the 1947 film *Lady From Shanghai*, directed by Orson Welles and starring Rita Hayworth. The clip places the sign on Grant Avenue for at least 70 years.

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

Li Po Lounge was recognized by the San Francisco Examiner in 2009 and was named one of the Top 10 Dive Bars in San Francisco in 2011 by SF Weekly. The bar has 4 out of 5 stars on Yelp. As recently as February 24, 2019, Li Po Lounge was mentioned in the San Francisco Chronicle in an article by Jonathan Kauffman on "The Glory of Old Bars."

Li Po Lounge is recommended in the American Automobile Association (AAA) guidebook to San Francisco and is listed as a place to visit at the Chinatown Visitor Information Center at 625 Kearny Street.

On May 8, 2019, Li Po Lounge was presented with a Small Business Award from Mayor London N. Breed in recognition of its small business success.

Other awards of recognition for small business success:

- San Francisco Board of Supervisors – Aaron Peskin, December 10, 2018
- United States House of Representatives – Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, May 8, 2019
- California State Senate – Scott Wiener, May 8, 2019
- California State Board of Equalization – Malia M. Cohen, May 8, 2019
- California State Assembly – Phil Ting, May 8, 2019
- Art Deco Society of California – Award for the preservation of the historical lantern, May 2018

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

One of the very first things people see when they enter the bar is a photograph of Anthony Bourdain from the CNN food travel show "Parts Unknown" posing with a Li Po Lounge employee. Anthony Bourdain loved the Chinese Mai Tai so much that the Li Po Lounge was

featured in his 2012 episode titled *The Layover*. The episode was covered in an article published on January 10, 2012, in the Miami New Times entitled "Anthony Bourdain's The Layover: I Left My Liver in San Francisco (A Recap)" written by Laine Doss (<https://www.miaminewtimes.com/restaurants/anthony-bourdains-the-layover-i-left-my-liver-in-san-francisco-a-recap-6578322>). Li Po Lounge was one of Anthony Boudain's favorite watering holes.

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

Li Po Lounge donates to:

- One World Children Fund – Access to education, healthcare and safe home for children
- Wat Buddhapradeep of San Francisco – Buddhist Temple
- BeChinatown – Installation of Chinese lanterns that light up the streets for safety
- Partners Asia – Organization that helps Myanmar's vulnerable citizens

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

Li Po Lounge attracts a diverse crowd with its famous signature drink: their concoction of the Chinese Mai Tai. The well-known beverage consists of Chinese liqueur distilled from sorghum and rose petals mixed with 151 proof rum and a splash of pineapple juice. From 2:00 to 5:00 p.m., the crowd is mostly made up of visitors from tour groups. In the afternoon from 5:00 to 9:00 p.m., the customers are office workers from the financial district. After 5:00 p.m., about 75-80% of the bar patrons are local residents and regulars who sometimes stay until 1:30 a.m.

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

Outside the bar is an intricate, six-sided, 70-year-old neon Chinese lantern that appeared in Orson Welles' 1947 film "The Lady from Shanghai - On the Lam." With funding from the City and County of San Francisco through its Office of Economic and Workforce Development, the lantern was restored and repainted in 2018. A lighting ceremony attended by City officials took place on December 10, 2018. The Art Deco Society of California presented the bar with an award for the preservation of the historical lantern.

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

Being the oldest bar in Chinatown, if Li Po were to close, it would be like losing a family member. In an interview with The San Francisco Examiner, bartender Daniel Choi – who was a regular himself in the 1980s and is now the one serving drinks – stated that there are regulars who have been going to the bar for 60 years. Although there may be other bars, relationships built over time while at Li Po Lounge would be lost if Li Po were to move or shut down. In addition, all seven staff members would lose their jobs.

CRITERION 3

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

Opened in 1937, Li Po Lounge's defining characteristics are the cavernous-looking entrance, the unique neon lantern that hangs over the entrance, a golden Buddha statue that sits behind the bar and their signature drink, the Chinese Mai Tai. The bar attracts tourists and clients from the Financial District, but it is the regulars, some who have been patronizing the bar for over 60 years through numerous different owners, who give the bar life.

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)

Li Po Lounge is committed to maintaining its historical tradition as a dive bar. It is a gathering hole and stopping place for friends, neighbors, locals and visitors, old and young alike. Li Po Lounge will not change the exterior or interior physical characteristics of the space, as they must maintain their reputation as a cool dive bar from the past.

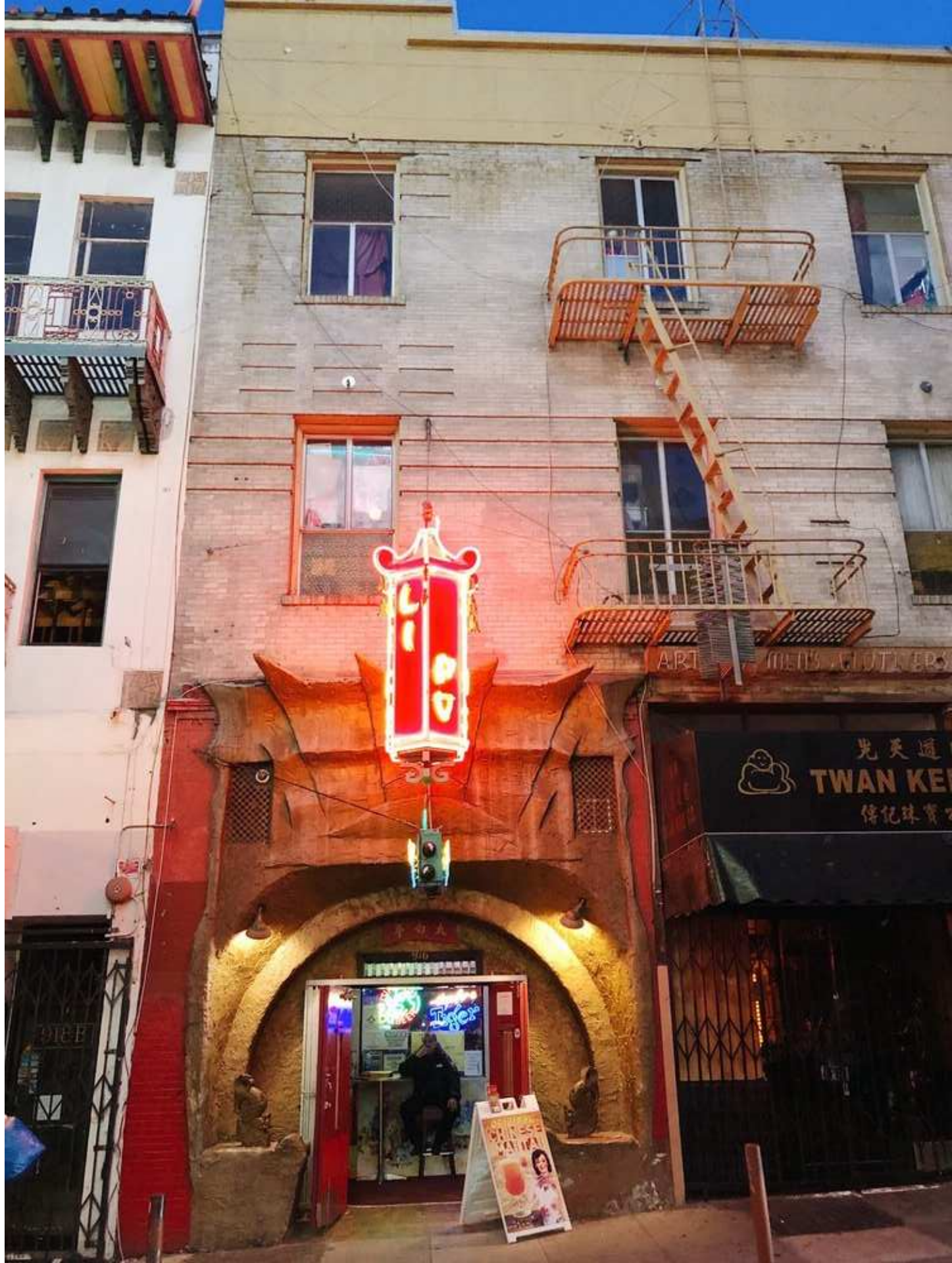
c. How has the business demonstrated a commitment to maintaining the special physical features that define the business? Describe any special exterior and interior physical characteristics of the space occupied by the business (e.g. signage, murals, architectural details, neon signs, etc.).

Li Po Lounge is committed to maintaining the intricate, six-sided, neon Chinese lantern on the exterior of the building, the golden Buddha statue that sits behind the bar and their signature Chinese Mai Tai drink.

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

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







大華公司

光天通院
TWAN KEE CO.

916



YANTING
BEER
燕京啤酒

Tiger

THIS RESTROOMS
FOR
CUSTOMERS
ONLY
ASK
ATTENDANT
FOR KEY

NOTICE

NO PERSONS
UNDER 21
ALLOWED



ESQUIRE CHANNEL
BEST BAR
EP2, 2015 IN AMERICA
THE ULTIMATE
CHINESE NAI TAI

Anthony Bourdain
Layover in SF 2012

HBO: filming Movie

LOOKING
in
LiPo Lounge

No outside
food or
drink
allowed
thank you



Anthony Bourdain
Loyover in SF 2012

Filmed in
LiPo Lounge

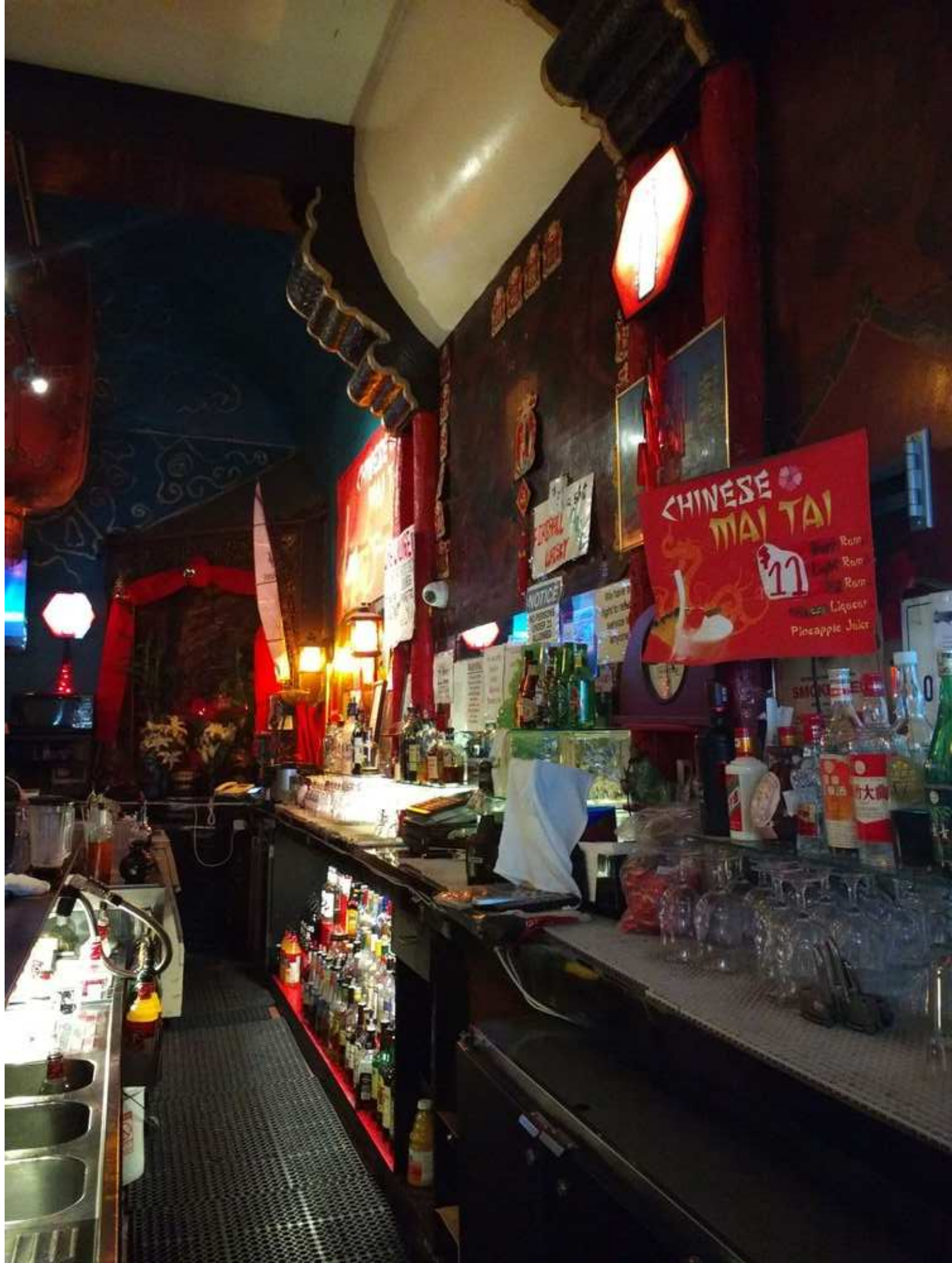


HBO: filming movie

LOOKING

in
LiPo Lounge







CHINESE MAI TAI

~~White~~ Dark Rum - ~~Light~~ Light Rum
~~White~~ 151 Rum - Chinese Liqueur
Pineapple Juice

LIP LOUNGE

BOTTLES ONLY \$5
HOUSE SPECIAL
CHINESE
MAI TAI \$11
TSING TAO
LUCKY BUDDHA
ANCHOR STEAM
HEINEKEN
CORONA
TIGER BEER

\$6
FIREBAR
WHI

\$20 minimum
charge
water \$2









LI PO LOUNGE EST. 1937
SAN FRANCISCO

BEST BARS IN AMERICA

NEW SEASON **APRIL 1** 9|8c

Esquire
NETWORK

LI PO
 Chinatown's Newest Cocktail Lounge
 "A Pace from the
 Dynasty of Tang"
 Invites you
 to its
Grand Opening
 ON
Chinese New Year's Eve
 Feb. 10th, 1937

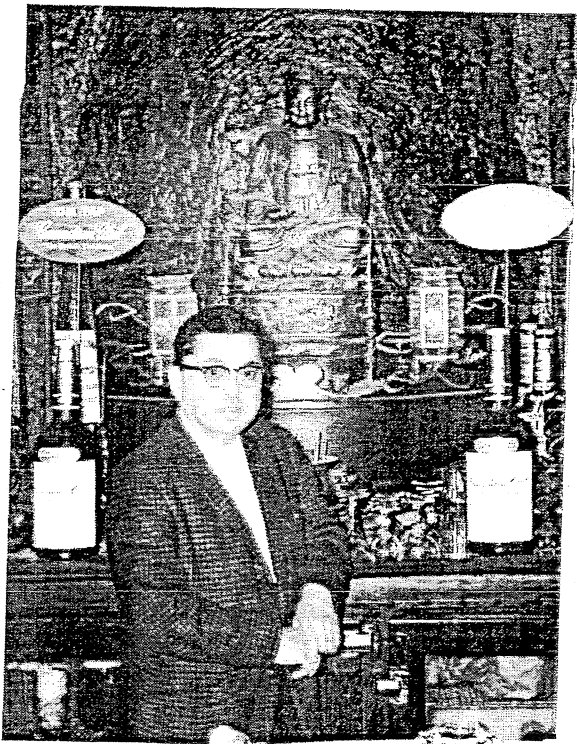
MANAGEMENT
 Wilbert Wong
 W. Jack Chow

PHONE: CHINA 3916
 918 Grant Ave.
 San Francisco

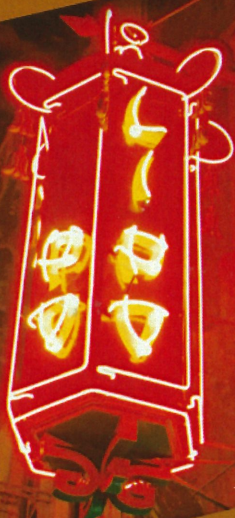
Opening announcement for the Li Po, 1937.



The Li Po.



Wilbert Wong at the Li Po.

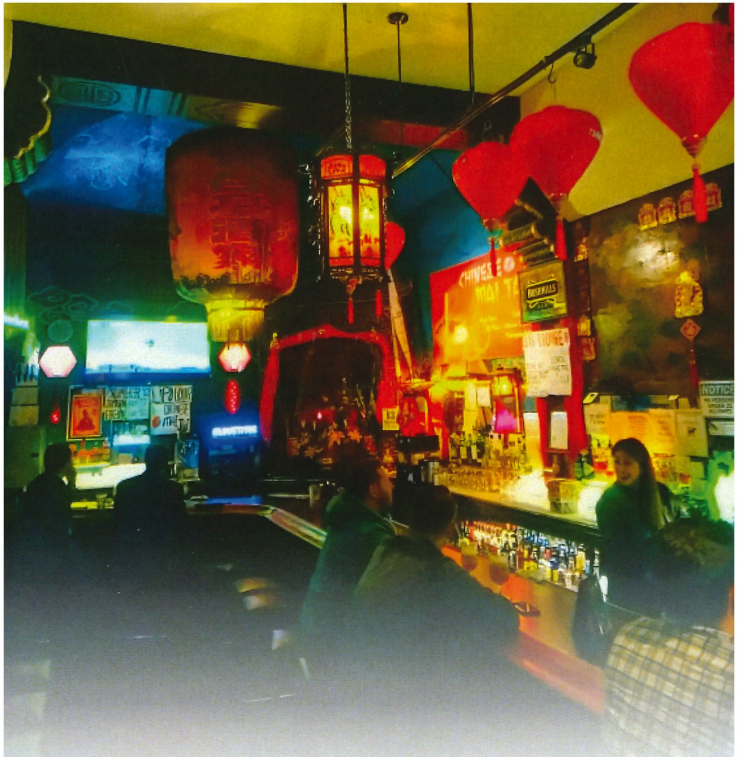


Li Po Lounge
太白亭酒吧

SINCE 1937

ORIGINAL[®]
CHINESE
MAI TAI





Li Po Lounge is named after one of the greatest poets in China's Tang Dynasty.

The Li Po Lounge is an unpretentious Chinatown dive bar that lies behind a set of double doors cut out of faux rocks with large red lacquered doors. It completes with a wraparound bar and ubiquitous, traditional Chinese lanterns for lighting and decoration. Situated behind the bar is a golden Buddha statue which you will not find in any other cocktail bar. Original Mai Tai is invented in Li Po Lounge.

To Make your trip memorable , you must come to the Li Po Lounge, try out the original Chinese Mai Tai and feel the different culture and atmosphere.

Address: 916 Grant Ave., San Francisco, CA 94108

Phone: (415)982-0072

Email: lipolounge@yahoo.com

Hours: Open Daily 2:00pm - 1:30am





SAN FRANCISCO'S HISTORY WITH THE MAI TAI AND FIVE PLACES TO DRINK THEM

July 8, 2015 By Avital Ungar



Everyone loves a good story; it's even better when it's paired up with a delicious cocktail. Here's a little bit of history of the Mai Tai cocktail followed by the five best places to drink a Mai Tai in the Bay Area.

History of the Mai Tai Cocktail

The Mai Tai — the quintessential tiki drink — is a great Bay Area story and delicious cocktail wrapped up in one intoxicating punch. It was created right in Oakland, CA, just like the Hell's Angels and the Black Panthers.

Vic Bergeron's original 1944 Mai Tai recipe is well known now, but during the early days, old Trader Vic kept the exact recipe to himself. "It was the drink everybody wanted to do and because it was a secret, everyone failed," says cocktail historian Wayne Curtis. "That's why we have so many bad Mai Tais."

The best ones stick to the original formula of aged Jamaican rum, fresh lime, a splash of orange curaçao, simple syrup and orgeat, a syrup made from almonds and a little orange flower or rose water. But what makes a Mai Tai really stand out is the atmosphere that goes with it, because the essence of a tiki culture is making you feel like you've been transported to another place.

<https://www.sftravel.com/article/san-franciscos-history-mai-tai-and-five-places-drink-them>

Maybe the search for the perfect Mai Tai is akin to the quest for the mythic tropical paradise that birthed the tiki culture. We like to imagine it as a place where rivers flow with Daiquiris, scorpions are relatively tame and a Zombie apocalypse is a good thing.

Fortunately, a satisfying Mai Tai is much easier to find. If you want to experience the king of all tiki drinks, then here are five San Francisco Bay Area spots to check out.

Five Best Places to Drink a Mai Tai in the Bay Area

Smuggler's Cove (650 Gough St., San Francisco)

As the name suggests, Smuggler's Cove is rather obscure from the outside. Inside, it's moody with pirates and rigging and water features. But don't be fooled: you're in a temple to rum and one of the most respected bars in the country and they serve a classic Mai Tai to match.

[The Tonga Room](#) (950 Mason St., San Francisco)

It's a bit jarring going from the posh atmosphere of the Fairmont Hotel into the legendary Tonga Room. Imagine walking into the Love Boat or a commercial for Carnival Cruise Lines. Tune it all out and pay attention to your nuanced and balanced drink served in a ceramic coconut that seems to get frostier as you sip. You'll be smiling and maybe even singing along to R&B favorites from the '60s to the '80s. No need to be embarrassed; everyone else is doing it too. [Website](#)

Li Po Cocktail Lounge (916 Grant Ave., San Francisco)

If you Google "dive bar San Francisco," Li Po is on the first page of the results. But what dive bars lack in hip décor, they make up for in authentic atmosphere and strong drinks. So, don't be put off by the neon over the door, the tattered red lantern swinging overhead or the blasé bartender — Anthony Bourdain wasn't. Order the Chinese Mai Tai, a sweet-but-deadly mix of three rums, a Chinese liqueur distilled from sorghum and rose petals, plus a splash of pineapple juice.

Longitude (347 14th St., Oakland)

Right in the heart of Oakland, Suzanne Long has created an exotic pan-tiki escape. The verdant walls dotted with African masks, the staff's game warden attire and the giraffe swizzle sticks add to the kitschy charm. What sets her Mai Tai apart is the housemade almond-macadamia syrup and the elegant Pierre Ferrand orange curaçao. It's a Mai Tai that's truly out of this world.

Forbidden Island (1304 Lincoln Ave., Alameda)

This is retro tiki at its finest, with puffer fish, hand-carved totems, a cocktail umbrella art installation and even madcap movies from the era to put you in the right frame of mind. They make the Mai Tai two ways: classic Trader Vic's style, plus a Hawaiian version that includes pineapple juice and a splash of dark rum. Which one is better? You be the judge.

Avital Ungar is the owner of [Avital Food Tours](#) which takes guests behind-the-scenes in the San Francisco culinary scene on walking food tours in the [Mission District](#), the [Haight Ashbury](#), [North Beach](#) and [craft cocktails](#) in [Union Square](#). Get more information at www.avitaltours.com.

Photo by [Todd Lappin](#) / [CC BY-NC](#)



Shawn Clover/Flickr

Neon Renaissance: Li Po Lounge Is Latest To Restore Classic Sign With City Help

When the lights go up in the city

by [Caleb Pershan](#) | Aug 29, 2017, 2:16pm PDT

Historic Chinatown dive bar **Li Po Cocktail Lounge** plans to re-illuminate its partially working neon sign, a Chinese lantern that's beckoned customers through its cavern door for more than 70 years. And Li Po isn't alone: Thanks to city grants, avid preservationists, and growing public enthusiasm, legacy signs like those at The Elk Hotel, Sam Wo, and Eastern Bakery are flickering back on all over San Francisco.

Last week, the city's Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD) gave preliminary approval for a grant to restore Li Po's sign, entitling the

business to anywhere from \$4,000 to \$15,000. Since 2009, the OEWD has given businesses more than \$2.7 million for neon sign restoration and other storefront improvements like exterior painting and awning additions through its SF Shines program.



© Al Bama and Randall Ann Homan

While restored neon signs look great, SF Shines isn't purely aesthetic in purpose. "The look of a storefront can determine if you get business, or if you don't," says Gloria Chan, director of communications for the OEWD. And for the city, it's better that businesses thrive. "Successful restaurants reduce storefront vacancies, add to the variety of neighborhood-serving small businesses, [and] create good jobs for residents."

Consider Beep's Burgers, which opened in the Ingleside neighborhood in 1962. "When I bought Beep's from its original owners in 2014, all the customers would mention how they loved the neon sign," Samantha Wong recalls. "I felt like, if I restored it, it would bring in more customers, and it would also make the regulars happy."



OEWD





SF Shines

To do so, Wong enlisted Lee's Signs, an Oakland-based neon sign repairer. The restoration cost about \$20,000, more than 70 percent of it paid for by SF Shines. Beep's restored rocket, its tip flashing on and off, was fabricated by [Shawna Peterson](#), a Bay Area tube-bender extraordinaire.

Tube-bending, the art of hand-shaping glass tubes to be filled with luminous gas like neon (or, more often, argon), is a painstaking craft. Practitioners like those at Lee's Signs and [Neon Works](#), owned by Oakland neon expert Jim Rizzo, have kept the tradition alive by restoring old signs and crafting new ones. Neon Works, for example, maintains recognizable signage from the Castro Theatre's blinking marquee to the white neon owl of the Tenderloin's Owl Tree bar.

To qualify for a grant from SF Shines, businesses must be on a long-term lease and located in certain areas of the city. "Despite a strong economy, some commercial corridors in San Francisco's outer neighborhoods are struggling to both support existing restaurants and to attract new ones to vacant storefronts,"

says Chan. So far, SF Shines has restored signs in neighborhoods like the Tenderloin, the Excelsior, and Chinatown.



Inside Neon Works | [San Francisco Neon Book/Facebook](#)





Angela B./Yelp





Frank Shor National Geographic, Getty Images

RELATED

[Where to Eat and Drink in Chinatown](#)

Next up — pending final approval from the OEWD — is Li Po Cocktail Lounge. One of the city’s oldest bars, Li Po is particularly well known for its Chinese Mai Tai, a concoction of three kinds of rum and mysterious “Chinese liquor” endorsed by Anthony Bourdain. Li Po’s popularity is going strong, but the bar’s neon sign (and honestly, all the rest of it) has seen better days, as documented by archival images that show it fully illuminated. Several of its tubes are now broken.

Even in its partially-lit state, the Li Po sign merits a stop on neon walking tours led by Al Barna and Randall Ann Homan. The couple of neon preservationists co-authored the book *San Francisco Neon: Survivors and Lost Icons*, now in its third printing, and lead twice-monthly neon tours through neighborhoods like Cow Hollow, Chinatown, and the Tenderloin/Lower Nob Hill. Their tours, frequently sold-out, begin at sunset to capture the golden hour glow of neon at twilight.

In 1937, Li Po was the second bar to open in Chinatown after Prohibition. Its elaborate sign is trimmed with neon, and a second neon sign hangs below it. “The imaginative design and excellent fabrication of the Li Po sign make it a classic example of the sign maker’s art form,” says Barna. “Its long association with Chinatown and Grant Avenue make it a San Francisco icon.”





Charles Chapman

The allure of neon signs is simple to Barna: It's the quality of ambient light. "A quiet scene can be turned into something out of a movie set," he says — which is also no coincidence. "We talk about the cinematic quality of neon signs, and in part, that comes directly from films, particularly noir." Case in point: Li Po's

neon lantern appears in the 1947 film *Lady From Shanghai*, directed by Orson Welles and starring Rita Hayworth. The clip places the sign on Grant Avenue for at least 70 years.

The restored signage could draw more crowds to Li Po — that’s what happened at Beep’s, its owner says. “I think restoring the sign helped some in gaining more business,” but that’s not all. “Changing the menu, making some cosmetic changes, and improving service is what really helped Beep’s restore its glory.”

Beyond attracting customers, though, signs like Li Po’s light up the street for everyone, improving safety and walkability according to the OEWD. As opposed to the large signs of Las Vegas, built to appeal to motorists, the neon signs of San Francisco are more human in scale, advertising small businesses to pedestrians.



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Take a Neon Tour of San Francisco Signage

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Doc's Clock Owner Loses Battle With Landlord Over Classic Sign [UPDATED]

The fact that a city in 2017 is actively encouraging businesses to restore their neon signs — Oakland is reportedly considering its own program — represents a striking reversal in neon’s reputation. City beautification movements once saw removing neon signs, associated with vice, as key to their mission.

“Neon was really vilified, and considered blight,” explains Homan, “so you have to give a hats off to the small mom and pop businesses who preserved them.” In San Francisco, Barna and Homan count 200 “survivors,” but many more signs were lost. As the couple writes in their book, “Hundreds of signs were destroyed during 1970s urban redevelopment. It seems like a bit of a miracle when a 1920s Art Deco neon sign survives intact.”



© Al Barna and Randall Ann Homan



© Al Barna and Randall Ann Homan



Phil Whitehouse/Flickr

But what once bespoke seedy strips now signals a wholesome throwback, and the glowing neon that attracted yesterday's noir directors entices today's Instagrammers. "[Neon] photographs beautifully, much better than a lit painted sign," restaurant branding designer Richard Pandiscio [told Eater NY](#), who documented the resurgence of neon there. "That does make it perfect for Instagram. There's also a warmth and a touch of nostalgia that comes with it, the sense that the establishment has been around a while."

Here in San Francisco, where Instagram-ability is demanded of new bars and restaurants, neon is fully trending. Mr. Holmes Bakehouse, one early example of the new wave, is photographed nearly as often for its sassy, indoor sign as its tasty cruffins, extending neon's reach into the digital world.



But hashtag recognition is just one way to show support for neon. “If you go by a coffee shop, go in and buy a coffee, and tell them you love their neon sign,” Homan recommends. “Owners don’t know if it’s working unless you tell them.”

That’s the best way to keep the lights on.



© Al Bama and Randall Ann Homan



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<https://sf.eater.com/2018/11/6/18068442/li-po-cocktail-lounge-sign-restored-neon-san-francisco-chinatown>



Chinatown's Oldest Bar Brings Iconic Lantern Back to Life

Li Po is looking spiffy (at least from outside)

by [Caleb Pershan](#) Nov 6, 2018, 10:21am PST



sfneon.org

One aspect of lovably downtrodden Chinatown dive bar [Li Po Cocktail Lounge](#) is looking very fresh these days: Its 70-year-old neon sign, an intricate, six-sided Chinese lantern. Long broken and flickering, the Li Po lantern was restored and relit last week. Now it's ready to lure more drinkers through the bar's cavern-like doors at 916 Grant Avenue for drinks like Li Po's famous Chinese Mai Tai: A dangerous concoction of three rums and mysterious "Chinese liqueur" favored by the late Anthony Bourdain.

<https://sf.eater.com/2018/11/6/18068442/li-po-cocktail-lounge-sign-restored-neon-san-francisco-chinatown>

Li Po's sign restoration was funded in part by SF taxpayers: The city's Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD) assists businesses like Li Po through its SF Shines program, which grants up to \$15,000 for storefront improvements including sign restoration.

The goal isn't just aesthetic. "The look of a storefront can determine if you get business, or if you don't," Gloria Chan, director of communications for the OEWD, [told Eater SF](#) last year. "Successful restaurants reduce storefront vacancies, add to the variety of neighborhood-serving small businesses, [and] create good jobs for residents."

Oakland-based Arrow Sign Company restored Li Po's sign, with SF neon preservationists, authors, and tour guides Randall Ann Homan and Al Barna advising on historical color matching and more. The process involves hand-bending glass tubes to be filled with luminous gas such as neon, per the name, though argon is more common.

"Li Po is one of the most unique neon signs in San Francisco," says Barna. "It has always been a highlight on our Chinatown neon walking tour."

To make the most of the process, he and Homan photo documented the restoration, creating a guide to best practices for historic sign rejuvenation.

"This was a great opportunity," says Homan. "Working with both SF Shines and the Arrow Sign Company on the Li Po restoration project gave us more insight into all the little details that make for a brilliant neon restoration."



sfneon.org

Neon signage — long derided — has experienced its own rehabilitation in recent years. New restaurants are keen to commission flashy neon signs, often with Instagram in mind. Think, for instance, of the "I got baked in SF" sign at Mr. Holmes. In fact, neon has always photographed rather well, and has long captured the eye of cinematographers.

<https://sf.eater.com/2018/11/6/18068442/li-po-cocktail-lounge-sign-restored-neon-san-francisco-chinatown>

“We talk about the cinematic quality of neon signs, and in part, that comes directly from films, particularly noir,” says Barna. One good example? Li Po’s neon lantern appears in the 1947 Orson Wells film *The Lady From Shanghai* starring Rita Hayworth. Now restored, the Li Po sign is ready for its next close up.



Caleb Pershan



11 Quintessential Dive Bars in San Francisco

By [Matt Charnock](#)

Mar 14, 2019



When it comes to weeknight drinks, nothing gets us like the dilapidated charm of cheap neighborhood watering holes.

For no-frills drinks, greasy bar bites, quirky decor, graffiti-scribbled bathrooms, analog photo booths, and jukeboxes, these are San Francisco's most beloved dive bars.

Kozy Kar Bar

One of our favorite NSFW-skewed watering holes—porn, straight and gay, plays on the wall-mounted televisions when the sun goes down—Kozy Kar harkens back to the care-free 70s. The drinks are, as you'd expect, remarkably cheap for SF, and the ambiance is, say, *That-70s-Show-meets-the-HGTV's-roster-of-home-decorating-shows*. (Custom vans, eight track players, CB radios, waterbeds, chain steering wheels, shag carpets, oh my!) Leave any semblance of prudence at home, please. // 1548 Polk St. (Polk Gulch), kozykar.com

Li Po Cocktail Lounge

Nestled on the edge of Chinatown, Li Po Cocktail Lounge exists as a dimly lit former opium den, where, instead of illicit drugs, now live bands and potent drinks fill the halls and basement. Their signature Chinese mai tais are the go-to libations here, which you can sip seated alongside the wraparound bar or atop a "well-loved" red leather booth. Ubiquitous, traditional Chinese lanterns hang from the ceilings for decoration and practicality. On your way out, feel free to send a silent offering to the gold-plated Buddha statue near the door. // 916 Grant Ave. (Chinatown), lipolounge.com

The Saloon

Set in a late-1800s atmosphere, The Saloon presents itself as a window into a simpler, less high-strung way of drinking in the city. Live music is a daily calendar event, where relaxed vibes and a diverse crowds intersect across the bartop; The Saloon, above all else, is an ode to an SF of past, one you can see, hear, and even smell when walking through their single narrow entryway. Cash is the preferred payment method here, so make sure you've got some bills on you, beforehand. // 1232 Grant Ave. (Jackson Square), sfblues.net/saloon

The Cinch Saloon

A haven for button-up gays in flannel and billiards enthusiasts, The Cinch exudes old-school dive bar vibes from everyone of its weathered corners, albeit with a hella homo twist. The drinks are effusively slung and quite strong; the outside patio is intimate, and also smoke-friendly; pool and pinball machines fill the narrow lounge. Keep an eye out on their [Facebook Events Page](#) for updates on drag shows, community potlucks, and more. // 1723 Polk St. (Polk Gulch), cinchsf.com

Hi Dive Bar

Postcard-lined walls, waterfront views, and pier-inspired decor serve as the diving platforms for bar bites and cheap(ish) libations. Brunch at Hi Dive pedestals their famous Bloody Mary, served saddle-side with such staples like Mission Huevos, French toasts, and more. Take your shot at the pool table in between drinks. And don't worry, you're not going crazy: There really is a bike hanging from above the bartop. // 28 Pier (Embarcadero), hidivesf.com

Aces Bar

Friendly, conversational bartenders and barbacks populate this no-frills Polk Gulch hub. A slurpee machine that, instead of churning scary froaths, stirs a frappuccino-like Irish Coffee available from 6 am to noon, making for a potentially left-of-center morning coffee run. Inexpensive, straightforward cocktails fill the menu, as well as a Keg Table, which can be reserved in advance. Jukebox playings vibrate off the red-painted walls, essentially all hours they're open. // 998 Sutter St., (Polk Gulch) acesbarsf.com

Zam Zam

One of the oldest, most beloved bars in San Francisco, Zam Zam has been Haight-Ashbury fulcrum for quenching a thirst since 1941. A Persian bar—with like-culture interior paraphernalia, including a drop-dead gorgeous back bar muralling—specializes in the martinis of yesteryear. Suffice to say that this cash-only (and prior Anthony Bourdain approved watering hole) is a must for locals and tourists, alike. // *1633 Haight St. (Haight-Ashbury)*, [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/zamzambars)

Louie's Bar

Louie's Bar is a bit more unassuming than its sister Pour Guys-owned watering hole, Tempest...to say the least. But it's this bar's bashful, brick-faced facade that makes it all the more worthwhile to checkout. A former whalers drinking establishment, with roots back to the 1930s, Louie's Bar splays its daily round of cocktails, mocktails, and other drinks across chalkboards. Upscale pub grub include such morsels like a killer grilled cheese, vegan cauliflower burger, you name it. // *55 Stevenson St. (SoMa)*, [pourguys.com](https://www.pourguys.com)

The Knockout

Akin to Beauty Bar's SF installment, sans the obvious nightclub chain normalities, the Knockout houses DJ dance parties, live punk band playings, bingo nights, and an all around no-frill dive bar experience. Knockout's weekly Sweater Funk Superfly dance party is reason enough to bob and weave to Motown and Soul anthems after downing a bit of liquid courage. A word to the wise: Don't leave without signing a pose in the photo booth. // *3223 Mission St. (Bernal Heights)*, [theknockoutsf.com](https://www.theknockoutsf.com)

Tempest Bar & Box

The long-standing and undoubtedly most popular dive bar in San Francisco, Tempest is the brick-exposed, rustic mecca for frugal drinks and live music. The bar, itself, maintains some of its old vintage 50's-era fixtures, mixed in with modern-day technologies and conveniences. (Free WiFi!). The Tempest, too, doubles as a culinary playground for Box Kitchen; the pork belly potato skins are, alone, worth the after-work-day wait. // *431 Natoma St. (FiDi)*, [pourguys.com/tempest-bar](https://www.pourguys.com/tempest-bar)

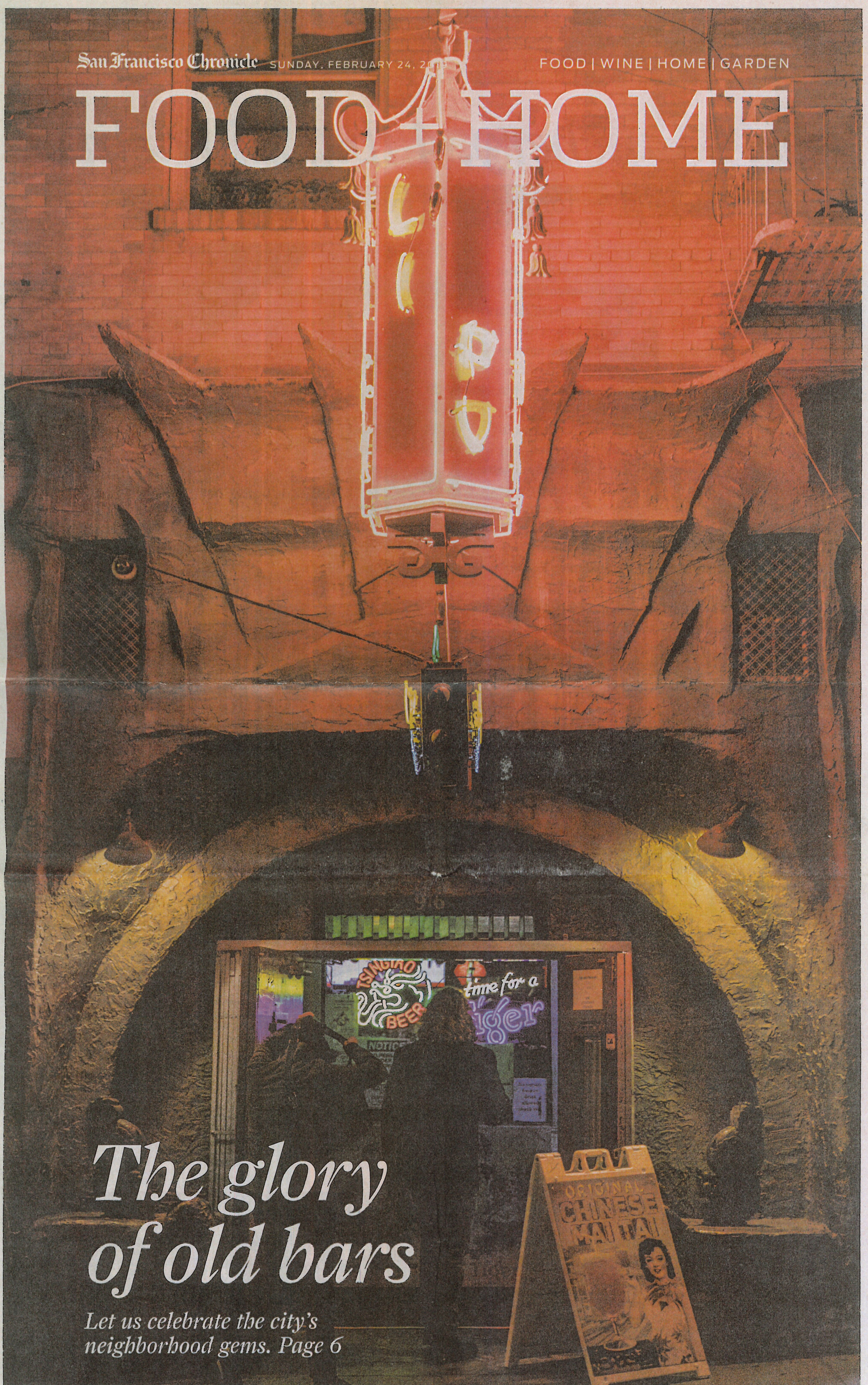
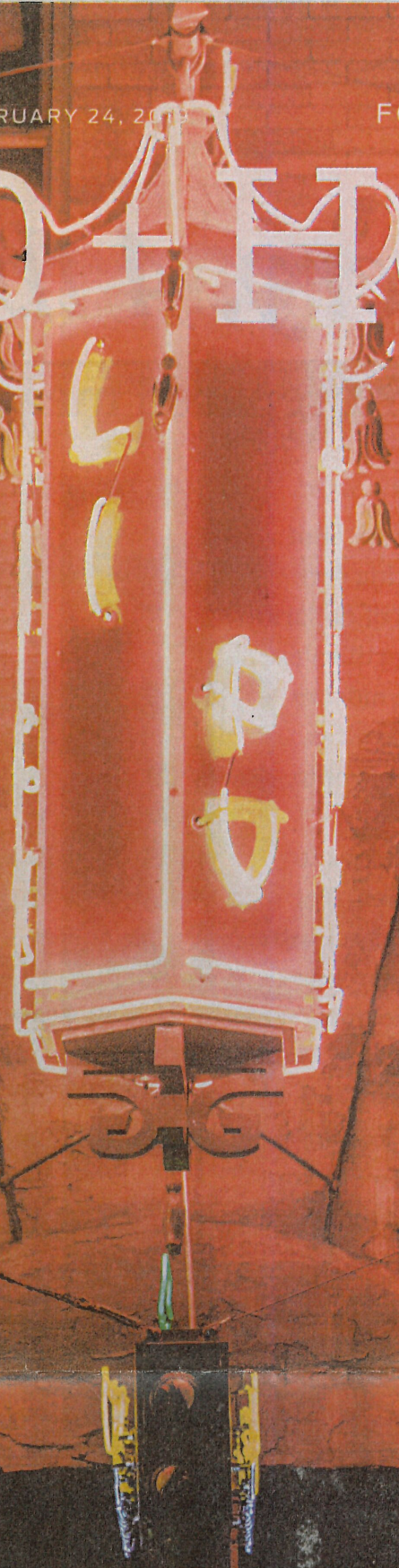
Zeitgeist

The award for the diviest and most beloved of San Francisco bars probably has to go to **Zeitgeist**—because let's be honest, this is where you go for cheap drinks (preferably bloody marys) once you're already drunk enough to eat one of their greasy-ass burgers. And there's just nothing better, especially when you and your gang can crowd in at a picnic table on a sunny day to get sloshed. // *199 Valencia St. (Mission)*, [instagram.com/zeitgeist_sf](https://www.instagram.com/zeitgeist_sf)

FOOD + HOME

The glory of old bars

*Let us celebrate the city's
neighborhood gems. Page 6*



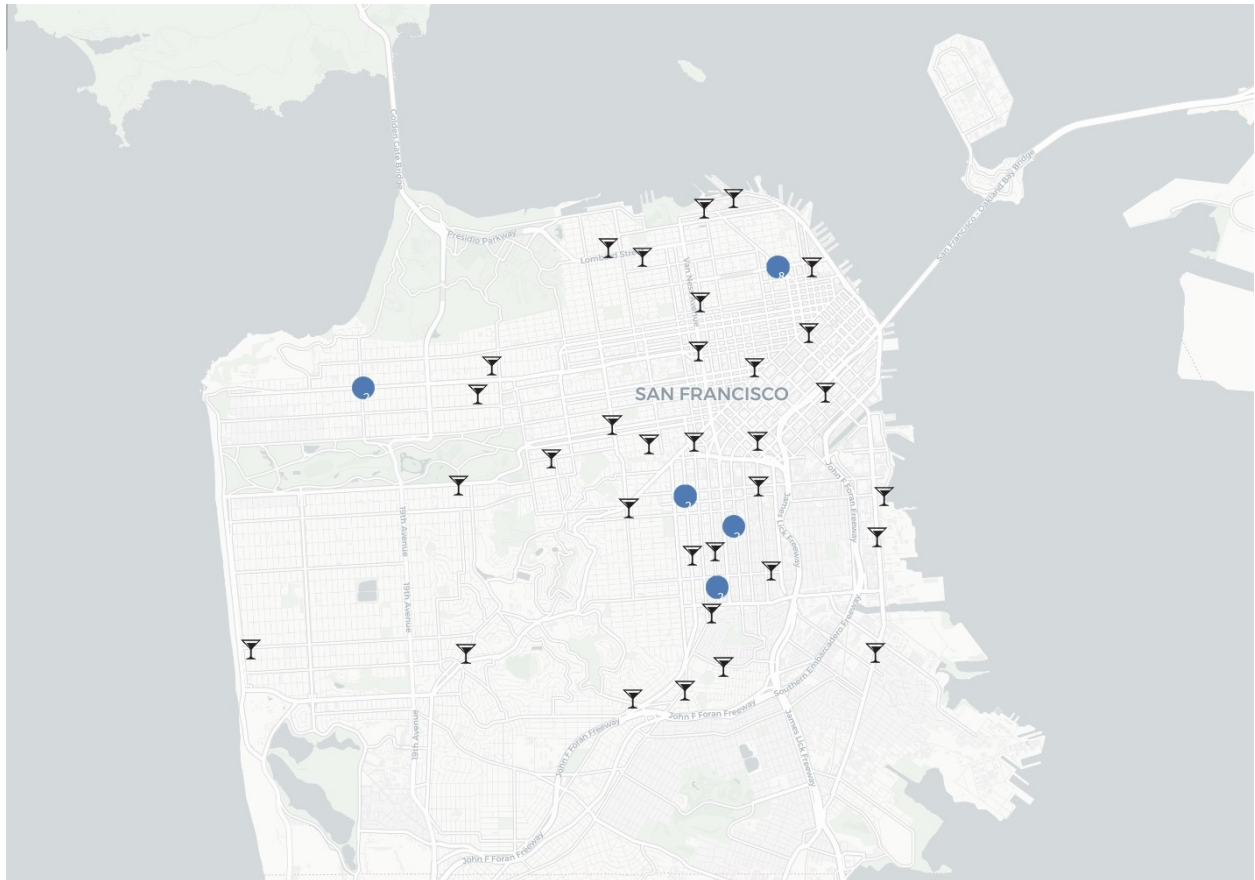
<https://projects.sfchronicle.com/guides/classic-sf-bars/>

San Francisco Chronicle

The Ultimate Guide to Classic S.F. Bars

Because the city's old bars come in all shapes and sizes, and they should all be appreciated.

By Esther Mobley | Feb. 21, 2019 | Updated: Feb. 21, 2019



The Gangway. The Elbo Room. Hemlock Tavern. The Lexington. Which beloved, long-standing bar will be the next to close?

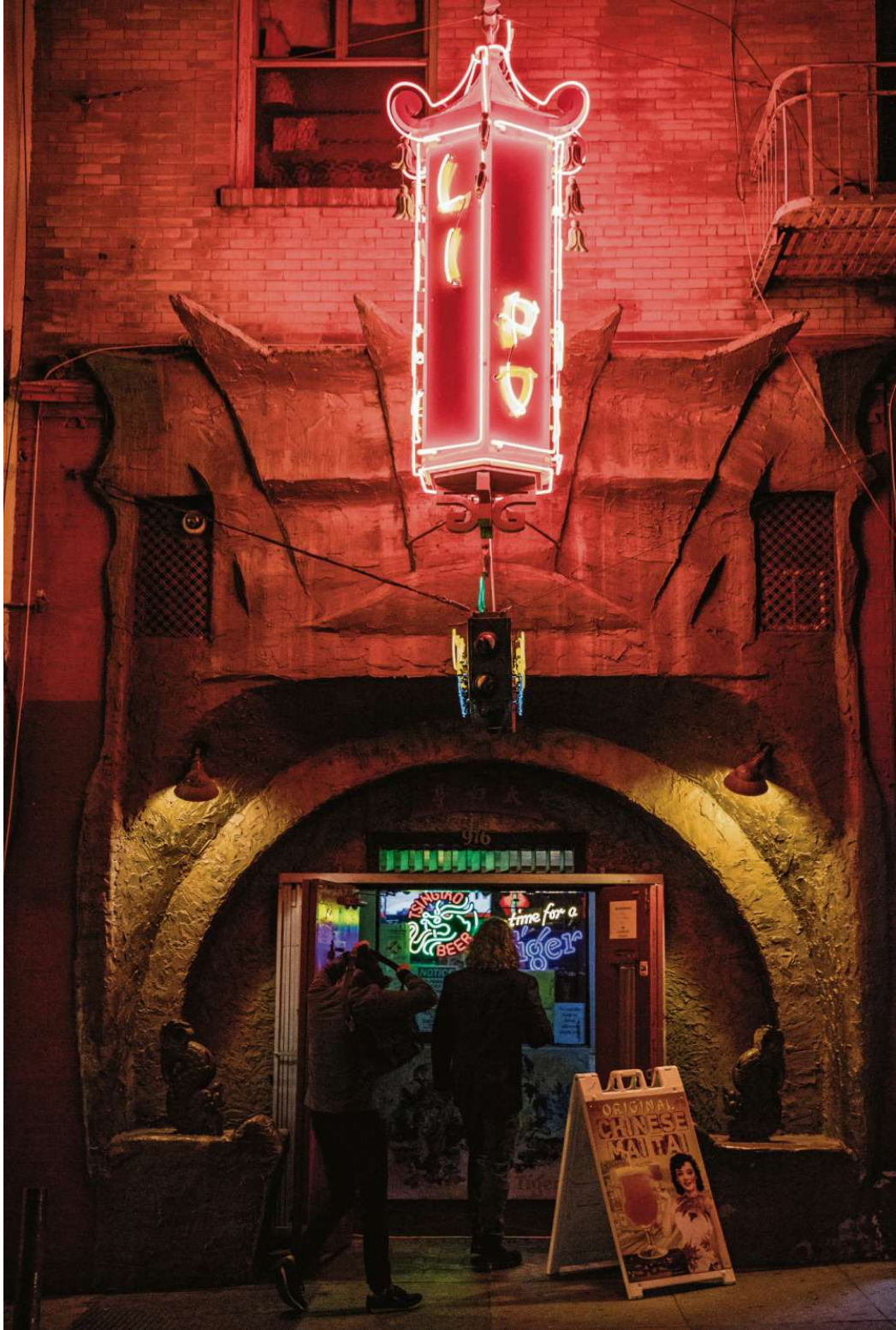
Every year, a little bit of the old yields to the new, and we mourn the loss of a bygone San Francisco – a San Francisco where a bar didn't have to have a “concept,” where drinks didn't cost \$15, where bartenders actually talked back to you. Whenever news circulates that a local drinking institution like Mr. Bing's or Doc's Clock or the 500 Club changes owners, or loses its lease, or might, for any other reason, be forced to close, we hear an outcry from sentimental San Franciscans who don't want to see another dive bar, or neighborhood bar, or family-oriented bar eclipsed by a faux speakeasy serving matcha-infused cocktails.

1937

Li Po Lounge



Jessica Christian / The Chronicle



Jessica Christian / The Chronicle



The sounds of liar's dice – rattle-rattle-rattle-THUMP – are a constant at Li Po in the nighttime, but they're far from the only reason people come to Chinatown's most picturesque bar. Like much of Grant Avenue, an architectural confection since it was rebuilt after the 1906 earthquake, Li Po wears its weathering beautifully, with tattered paper lanterns and ornate wood fixtures rimmed with dust. Along the bar, green bottles of Lucky Buddha beer alternate with Li Po's signature cherry-topped Chinese mai tais, predatory in their sweetness as well as their strength. The day drinking here is superb, if you're not a sunny-day kind of bar goer. There are few spaces where Chinatown locals and tourists and San Franciscans from other neighborhoods drink alongside one another.

Jonathan Kauffman



THE
ART
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OF CALIFORNIA

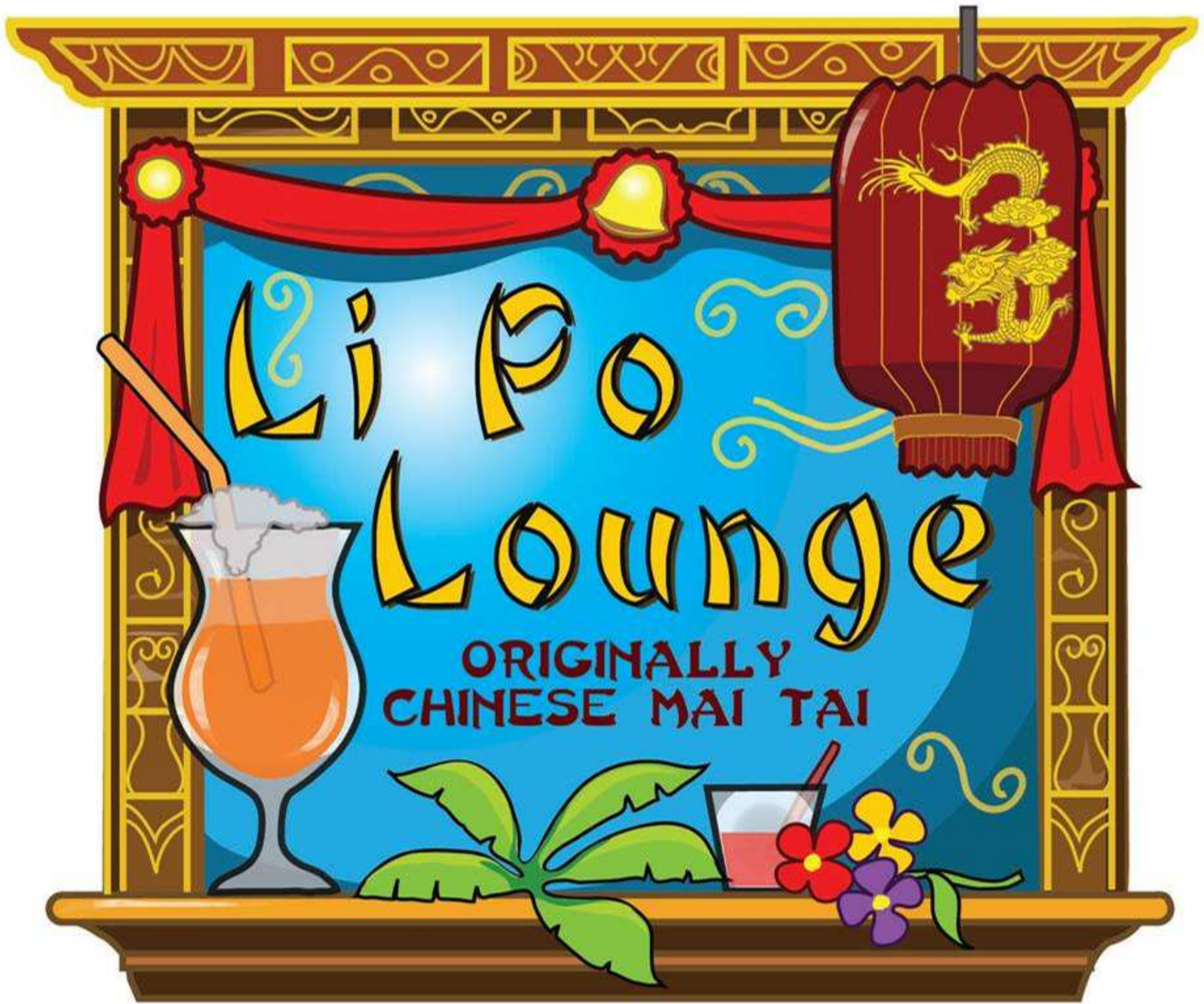


PRESENTS THIS AWARD FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION TO

ΦΙ ΦΟ COCKTAIL & LOUNGE
SAN FRANCISCO, 1937

RESTORATION OF AEON SIGN
& FUNDED BY S& SHINES





Li Po

Lounge

ORIGINALLY
CHINESE MAI TAI

Filing Date: October 9 , 2019
Case No.: 2019-020093LBR
Business Name: Li Po Lounge
Business Address: 916 Grant Avenue
Zoning: CVR (Chinatown-Visitor Retail) Zoning District
50-N Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 0194/012
Applicant: Kenneth Lee, President
916 Grant Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94108
Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Located In: District 3
Staff Contact: Shelley Caltagirone - (415) 558-6625
shelley.caltagirone@sfgov.org

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

The Li Po Lounge (“Li Po”) was established on February 10, 1937, on Chinese New Year's Eve as the first bar in Chinatown. It was named after Li Po, one of the greatest poets in China’s Tang dynasty. It is a small and unpretentious place that has changed little since the 1930s. It features a wraparound bar with red leather booths, Chinese lanterns, a golden Buddha statue, and pictures depicting the story of Li Po. Li Po Lounge is mentioned in numerous guidebooks as a place to visit when in San Francisco. Since 1997, the bar’s trademarked Chinese Mai Tai has been one of its most popular drinks.

The original owners of the bar were Wilbert Wong and William Jack Chow. They were the owners from 1937 to 1967. Wilbert Wong initiated the idea of a public celebration for Chinese New Year in San Francisco in 1953 and organized the first Chinese New Year Festival and Parade. William Jack Chow was one of the country’s first Chinese American lawyers and represented Chinese immigrants against federal immigration authorities. In addition to his law practice, he was actively involved in community and political activities and was widely known in the city.

From 1967 to 1997, ownership of the bar is unknown. From 1997 to 1999, Paul Lee and two partners owned Li Po Lounge. Little is known about them. In 1999, spouses Kenneth Lee and Yin Lan Fang Lee took over as owners of the bar. Kenneth was born in Burma and moved to China and eventually moved to the United States in 1981. He has been the sole owner of the bar since 2019.

The business is located on the east side of Grant Avenue between Washington and Jackson streets in the Chinatown neighborhood. It is within the CVR (Chinatown-Visitor Retail) Zoning District and a 50-N Height and Bulk District.

STAFF ANALYSIS

Review Criteria

1. *When was business founded?*

The business was founded in 1937.

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

Yes. Li Po Lounge qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- i. Li Po Lounge has operated continuously in San Francisco for 82 years.
- ii. Li Po Lounge has contributed to the history and identity of the Chinatown neighborhood and San Francisco.
- iii. Li Po Lounge 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?*

No.

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

Yes. The property is a contributor to the National-Register-eligible Chinatown Historic District.

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

Yes. The property has a Planning Department Historic Resource status codes of "A" (Historic Resource Present) because of its location within the National-Register-eligible Chinatown Historic District.

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

Yes. The business is noted in the LGBTQ Historic Context Statement as a popular spot for LGBTQ people in the late 1930's.

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

Yes. Li Po Lounge was recognized by the San Francisco Examiner in 2009 and was named one of the Top 10 Dive Bars in San Francisco in 2011 by SF Weekly. The bar has 4 out of 5 stars on Yelp. As recently as February 24, 2019, Li Po Lounge was mentioned in the San Francisco Chronicle in an article by Jonathan Kauffman on "The Glory of Old Bars."

Li Po Lounge is recommended in the American Automobile Association (AAA) guidebook to San Francisco and is listed as a place to visit at the Chinatown Visitor Information Center at 625 Kearny Street. On May 8, 2019, Li Po Lounge was presented with a Small Business Award from Mayor London N. Breed in recognition of its small business success. Other awards of recognition for small business success:

- San Francisco Board of Supervisors – Aaron Peskin, December 10, 2018
- United States House of Representatives – Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, May 8, 2019
- California State Senate – Scott Wiener, May 8, 2019

- California State Board of Equalization – Malia M. Cohen, May 8, 2019
- California State Assembly – Phil Ting, May 8, 2019
- Art Deco Society of California – Award for the preservation of the historical lantern, May 2018.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business

Location(s) associated with the business:

- 916 Grant Avenue

Recommended by Applicant

- Neon lantern sign
- The cavernous-looking, stone-clad entrance
- The golden Buddha statue
- The signature drink, the Chinese Mai Tai

Additional Recommended by Staff

- None



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Historic Preservation Commission Draft Resolution No.

HEARING DATE: NOVEMBER 6, 2019

Filing Date: October 9, 2019
Case No.: 2019-020093LBR
Business Name: Li Po Lounge
Business Address: 916 Grant Avenue
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San Francisco, CA 94108
Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Located In: District 3
Staff Contact: Shelley Caltagirone - (415) 558-6625
shelley.caltagirone@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

ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR LI PO LOUNGE CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 916 GRANT AVENUE, BLOCK/LOT 0194/012.

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 6, 2019, 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 Li Po Lounge 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 Li Po Lounge.

Location(s):

- *916 Grant Avenue*

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- *Neon lantern sign*
- *The cavernous-looking, stone-clad entrance*
- *The golden Buddha statue*
- *The signature drink, the Chinese Mai Tai*

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 2019-020093LBR to the Office of Small Business November 6, 2019.

Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ADOPTED: