



Legacy Business Registry Staff Report

Hearing Date: October 28, 2024

OSCAR'S PHOTO LAB

Application No.: LBR-2023-24-043
Business Name: Oscar's Photo Lab
Business Address: 790 Brannan St.
District: District 6
Applicant: Vartan Demirjian, Co-Founder & Owner
Nomination Date: April 30, 2024
Nominated By: Supervisor Matt Dorsey
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Oscar's Photo Lab is a photography lab providing services to amateur and professional photographers. The store was founded in 1982 by Noubar "Oscar" Demirjian, at 749 Larkin Street. For over a decade, from 1982 to 1993, the Larkin Street store became a beloved hub for photographers and amateurs alike, offering top-notch services. In 1993, Oscar's Photo Lab relocated to 790 Brannan Street, where it has remained to this day. The move to Brannan Street marked a significant expansion for the business, allowing for greater capacity and a wider range of services.

After the move, Oscar's son Vartan Demirjian joined the business as a co-owner. In 2023, Oscar passed away, and Vartan became the sole owner of the business.

As one of the last remaining photo labs in San Francisco, Oscar's Photo Lab not only provides essential photo services, but also serves as a hub for the photography community, offering guidance, expertise, and a sense of belonging. In addition, Oscar's Photo Lab has built relationships with significant businesses, individuals, and organizations, including providing photo services to iconic San Francisco companies such as Levi Strauss & Co., The Gap, and Westin St. Francis Hotel. The lab has also provided photography services for official events, ceremonies, and promotional materials for various San Francisco governmental departments, including the Mayor's Office, Fire Department, and Police Department.

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, Oscar's Photo Lab has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years:

749 Larkin St. from 1982 to 1993 (11 years)
790 Brannan St. from 1993 to Present (31 years)

CRITERION 2

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

Yes, Oscar's Photo Lab has contributed to the history and identity of the South of Market neighborhood and San Francisco.

Legacy Business Program
Office of Small Business
City Hall Room 140
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102
(415) 554-6680
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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:

- Oscar's Photo Lab has played an integral role in preserving the memories and milestones of significant events and individuals in the Bay Area. This includes providing archival printing services for historical photographs and documents related to Golden Gate Bridge 50th Anniversary commemoration event. Additionally, Oscar's Photo Lab has collaborated with the San Francisco Chronicle archives, assisting in the preservation and digitization of invaluable historical photographs and articles. By providing expert printing and reproduction services, the lab has helped make these archival materials accessible to the public, contributing to the documentation of the city's rich history.

Oscar's Photo Lab has worked closely with the San Francisco Longshoreman's Union (ILWU), providing printing services for their union archives. The Lab has also partnered with the San Francisco Public Library archives, assisting in the preservation of historical photographs and documents that are integral to the city's heritage. By providing expert printing services, the lab has helped make these archival materials accessible to researchers, historians, and the public, enriching our understanding of San Francisco's past. Finally, Oscar's Photo Lab has had the privilege of working with significant Bay Area photographers such as Ray "Scotty" Morris and Jim Marshall. These collaborations have involved printing and reproducing their iconic photographs, ensuring that their artistic legacies continue to inspire audiences. Through its association with significant people and events, Oscar's Photo Lab has demonstrated its commitment to preserving and celebrating the cultural heritage of San Francisco and the Bay.

- Oscar's Photo Lab was spotlighted in a San Francisco Examiner Article from September 2022 featuring both Noubar "Oscar" Demirjian and son, Vartan Demirjian. Years ago, Oscar's Photo Lab was hired to print a photo of Rosa Parks, which currently resides inside the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC.
- With regard to racial and social equity, Oscar's Photo Lab identifies as an immigrant- and person of color owned-business. Through community photo education partnerships and efforts to support various archival and historic documentation efforts, Oscar's Photo Lab has demonstrated its commitment to preserving and celebrating the cultural heritage of San Francisco and the Bay Area. This includes providing resources and printing services to help young photographers develop their skills and creativity through First Exposures, a local San Francisco non-profit organization dedicated to empowering youth through photography. Oscar's Photo Lab also works closely with several schools in San Francisco, including St. Ignatius High School and KZV Armenian School. Through these partnerships and collaborations, Oscar's Photo Lab has made a positive impact on the community by empowering youth, supporting educational endeavors, and fostering creativity and artistic expression.

CRITERION 3

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

Yes, Oscar's Photo Lab is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that Oscar's Photo Lab 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:

- Photography lab services including film processing, printing, scanning, and archival services.
- Preservation of memories through film.
- Fostering creativity and artistic expression.

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.

- Photography services.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Small Business Commission include Oscar's Photo Lab currently located at 790 Brannan St. in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
Legacy Business Program

Legacy Business Program

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Small Business Commission

Resolution No. _____

October 28, 2024

OSCAR'S PHOTO LAB

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District: District 6
Applicant: Vartan Demirjian, Co-Founder & Owner
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legacybusiness@sfgov.org

Adopting findings approving the Legacy Business Registry application for Oscar's Photo Lab, currently located at 790 Brannan 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 October 28, 2024, 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 Oscar's Photo Lab 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 Oscar's Photo Lab.

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Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Photography lab services including film processing, printing, scanning, and archival services.
- Preservation of memories through film.
- Fostering creativity and artistic expression.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission requires maintenance of the below listed core physical feature or tradition to maintain Oscar's Photo Lab on the Legacy Business Registry:

- Photography services.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Small Business Commission on October 28, 2024.

Katy Tang
Director

RESOLUTION NO. _____

Ayes –
Nays –
Abstained –
Absent –

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Legacy Business Registry

Application Review Sheet

Application No.: LBR-2023-24-043
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District: District 6
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Nomination Date: April 30, 2024
Nominated By: Supervisor Matt Dorsey

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

749 Larkin St. from 1982 to 1993 (11 years)
790 Brannan St. from 1993 to Present (31 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: September 18, 2024

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
Legacy Business Program

Legacy Business Program

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City and County
of San Francisco



Board of Supervisors,
District 6

MATT DORSEY

麥德誠

April 30th, 2024

Director Katy Tang, *Via email* <Katy.Tang@sfgov.org>
San Francisco Office of Small Business
City Hall, Room 140
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Director Tang,

Oscar's Photo Lab specializes in the meticulous preservation of your cherished memories. With a comprehensive range of services tailored to meet residents' unique needs, they are committed to safeguarding the moments that hold the greatest significance to families. From expert film processing to precise printing, meticulous scanning, and professional archival services, Oscar's Photo Lab ensures that your precious memories are treated with the utmost care and attention they deserve.

Since its inception, Oscar's Photo Lab has been honored to serve a diverse clientele, catering to a spectrum of individuals ranging from seasoned professional photographers to enthusiastic amateurs. Their valued clients include street photographers, newcomers to the craft, and everyone in between. Hailing from the vibrant creative communities of the Bay Area and San Francisco specifically, their clientele reflects a rich tapestry of ages, backgrounds, and artistic pursuits. At Oscar's, they take pride in welcoming and meeting the needs of each unique individual who walks through our doors, fostering a sense of inclusivity and belonging within their community.

Established in 1982 by Noubar "Oscar" Demirjian, Oscar's Photo Lab embarked on its journey at 749 Larkin Street, nestled near the intersection of O'Farrell, where it proudly served as its inaugural location. Over the span of a decade, from 1982 to 1992, the Larkin Street store flourished into a beloved hub for photographers and amateurs alike, renowned for its unparalleled services. Today, Oscar's Photo Lab stands as a testament to the resilience and determination of its founders and staff.

I believe that inclusion of Oscars Photo Lab on the Legacy Business Registry would be a fitting acknowledgment of its enduring impact on San Francisco's cultural tapestry. Thank you for considering this nomination.

Sincerely,

MATT DORSEY

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt Dorsey".



Legacy Business Registry Application



Business Information

Business name: Oscar's Photo Lab

Business owner name(s): Vartan Demirjian

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

Current business address: 790 Brannan Street, San Francisco, CA 94103

Telephone: (415) 621 - 5800 **Email:** oscars@oscarshotolab.com

Mailing address (if different than above):

Website: www.oscarshotolab.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064336703685 **Twitter:** Instagram: @OscarsPhotoLab

7-digit San Francisco Business Account Number (BAN): 0 3 7 6 7 6 8

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.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Immigrant-Owned Business | <input type="checkbox"/> Owned by Person with a Disability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> LGBTQ+-Owned Business | <input type="checkbox"/> Veteran-Owned Business |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Minority-Owned Business* | <input type="checkbox"/> 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: Vartan Demirjian

Contact person title: Co-Founder, Owner

Contact telephone: () - **Contact email:**

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: Vartan Demirjian

Signature: *Vartan Demirjian*

Date: 4/9/2024

OSCAR'S PHOTO LAB

Written Historical Narrative

INTRODUCTION

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

Oscar's Photo Lab specializes in preserving your precious memories through a range of services tailored to your needs. From film processing to printing, scanning, and archival services, Oscar's is dedicated to safeguarding the moments that matter most to you.

b. Describe whom the business serves.

Oscar's Photo Lab proudly serves a diverse clientele, spanning from seasoned professional photographers to enthusiastic amateurs, including street photographers and newcomers alike. Oscar's clients come from the creative communities of the Bay Area and San Francisco specifically, representing a wide range of ages and backgrounds.

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

Preserving memories through photography.

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.

Founded in 1982 by Noubar "Oscar" Demirjian, Oscar's Photo Lab first opened its doors at 749 Larkin Street, near the intersection of O'Farrell, serving as its founding location. For over a decade, from 1982 to 1993, the Larkin Street store became a beloved hub for photographers and amateurs alike, offering top-notch services.

In 1993, Oscar's Photo Lab relocated to 790 Brannan Street, where it has remained to this day. The move to Brannan Street marked a significant expansion for the business, allowing for greater capacity and a wider range of services. After the move, Oscar's son Vartan Demirjian joined the business as a co-owner.

In 2023, Oscar passed away, and Vartan became the sole owner of the business.

Today, Oscar's Photo Lab stands as a testament to the resilience and dedication of its founders and staff, remaining a cherished institution in the Bay Area and San Francisco photography community.

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

1983 to 1993: Noubar "Oscar" Demirjian
1993 to 2023: Noubar "Oscar" Demirjian; Vartan Demirjian
2023 to Present: Vartan Demirjian

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

In 2011, at 790 Brannan Street, Oscar's Photo Lab experienced a setback when a fire broke out, resulting in limited operations for a year while reconstruction efforts were underway. This unforeseen event temporarily disrupted the store's ability to provide full services to its customers.

Despite the challenges posed by the fire, the Demirjian family, owners of Oscar's Photo Lab, remained steadfast in their commitment to the business and worked diligently to rebuild and reopen the store. Their resilience ensured that Oscar's Photo Lab could continue its legacy of providing top-quality photography services to the SF Bay Area community.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic presented a significant challenge to the business, but Oscar's Photo Lab adapted their operations to ensure the safety of their staff and customers while continuing to provide essential services.

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.

Oscar's Photo Lab has built strong relationships with significant businesses, individuals, and organizations, contributing to its reputation as a trusted and valued partner in the community. Here's how:

- 1) Corporate Partnerships:** Oscar's Photo Lab has collaborated with iconic San Francisco companies such as Levi Strauss & Co., The Gap, and Westin St. Francis Hotel. Through these partnerships, the lab has provided professional photography services, contributing to the branding and marketing efforts of these esteemed companies.

- 2) **Fashion Industry Collaborations:** With connections in the fashion industry, Oscar's Photo Lab has worked with renowned designer Jessica McClintock, providing photography services for her collections and events.
- 3) **Government Partnerships:** Oscar's Photo Lab has also partnered with various San Francisco governmental departments, including the Mayor's Office, Fire Department, and Police Department. The lab has provided photography services for official events, ceremonies, and promotional materials, contributing to the City's communication and public outreach efforts.

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

Oscar's Photo Lab has played an integral role in preserving the memories and milestones of significant events and individuals in the Bay Area:

- 1) **Golden Gate Bridge 50th Anniversary:** Oscar's Photo Lab was honored to contribute to the commemoration of the Golden Gate Bridge's 50th anniversary. As a trusted partner, the lab provided archival printing services for historical photographs and documents related to this iconic landmark, ensuring that its legacy is preserved for generations to come.
- 2) **San Francisco Chronicle Archives:** Oscar's Photo Lab has collaborated with the San Francisco Chronicle archives, assisting in the preservation and digitization of invaluable historical photographs and articles. By providing expert printing and reproduction services, the lab has helped make these archival materials accessible to the public, contributing to the documentation of the city's rich history.
- 3) **ILWU (San Francisco Longshoreman's Union):** Oscar's Photo Lab has been privileged to work closely with the ILWU, providing printing services for their archives.
- 4) **San Francisco Public Library Archives:** Oscar's Photo Lab has partnered with the San Francisco Public Library archives, assisting in the preservation of historical photographs and documents that are integral to the city's heritage. By providing expert printing services, the lab has helped make these archival materials accessible to researchers, historians, and the general public, enriching our understanding of San Francisco's past.
- 5) **Collaboration with Iconic Photographers:** Oscar's Photo Lab has had the privilege of working with San Francisco photographers such as Ray "Scotty" Morris and Jim Marshall. These collaborations have involved printing and reproducing their iconic photographs, ensuring that their artistic legacies continue to inspire and captivate audiences.

Through its association with significant people and events, Oscar's Photo Lab has demonstrated its commitment to preserving and celebrating the cultural heritage of San Francisco and the Bay Area.

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

Oscar's Photo Lab has demonstrated its commitment to the community through partnerships with local organizations and educational institutions:

- 1) First Exposures:** As a supporter of First Exposures, a local San Francisco non-profit organization dedicated to empowering youth through photography, Oscar's Photo Lab has provided resources and printing services to help young photographers develop their skills and creativity.
- 2) St. Ignatius High School:** By working closely with St. Ignatius High School, Oscar's Photo Lab has supported the school's photography program and extracurricular activities. The lab's expertise and resources have enriched the educational experiences of students interested in photography and visual arts.
- 3) KZV Armenian School:** Oscar's Photo Lab has collaborated with the KZV Armenian School in San Francisco, providing photography services for school events, fundraisers, and promotional materials. This partnership highlights the lab's dedication to supporting educational initiatives within the Armenian community.

Through these partnerships and collaborations, Oscar's Photo Lab has made a positive impact on the community by empowering youth, supporting educational endeavors, and fostering creativity and artistic expression.

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

Oscar's Photo Lab was spotlighted in a San Francisco Examiner Article from September 2022 featuring both Nour "Oscar" Demirjian and son, Vartan Demirjian:

https://www.sfexaminer.com/news/the-city/despite-shortages-and-surges-film-photographers-committed-to-the-analog-lifestyle/article_b8d6a352-2a34-11ed-8f1c-777ebb796795.html

Years ago, Oscar's Photo Lab was hired to print a photo of Rosa Parks, which currently resides inside the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC.

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

Not applicable.

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

If Oscar's Photo Lab were to close, the community would face a considerable loss in several key areas:

- 1) **Photography Services:** As one of the few remaining photo labs in San Francisco, the closure would leave amateur, street, and professional photographers with limited options for accessing essential services such as film processing, printing, and archival preservation. This could significantly impact the ability of photographers to pursue their passion and document the life and culture of the city.
- 2) **Employment Opportunities:** The closure of Oscar's Photo Lab would result in the loss of jobs for its six employees, some of whom have been with the lab for many years. These employees rely on their jobs to support themselves and their families, and the closure would disrupt their livelihoods and financial stability.
- 3) **Community Support and Expertise:** Oscar's Photo Lab not only provides essential services but also serves as a hub for the photography community, offering guidance, expertise, and a sense of belonging.

In summary, the closure of Oscar's Photo Lab would not only impact photographers and employees but also diminish the cultural fabric and historical preservation efforts of the community as a whole.

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?

There isn't any special significance to the design of Oscar's Photo Lab and building.

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

Oscar's Photo Lab is committed to preserving memories through film.

c. What is the plan to keep the business open in the long term beyond the current ownership?

Converting Oscar's Photo Lab to employee ownership is an excellent strategy for ensuring its long-term success and sustainability. This approach can foster a sense of ownership and commitment among the employees, leading to increased productivity, loyalty, and dedication

to the business. Additionally, employee ownership can help retain experienced staff members and attract new talent, ensuring continuity in operations and service quality.

d. What challenges is the business facing today?

Oscar's Photo Lab confronts a range of challenges impacting its operations and customer experience.

- The scarcity of parking spaces poses logistical hurdles and inconveniences patrons, while transportation issues hinder product deliveries, affecting supply chain efficiency.
- High taxes strain financial sustainability, necessitating engagement with policymakers for relief measures.
- Concerns about crime in the area affect safety and security, potentially deterring foot traffic. Collaboration with law enforcement and community organizations can implement crime prevention measures.
- Additionally, addressing cleanliness issues in surrounding streets through community efforts and advocacy for sanitation services enhances the neighborhood's aesthetic appeal and overall attractiveness, crucial for maintaining a thriving business environment.

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.

Photography lab.

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 790 Brannan Street is “C - No Historic Resource Present.”



Archival photo of Oscar's Photo Lab, when it was located on Larkin Street



Oscar's Photo Lab

CUSTOM COLOR
BLACK & WHITE











https://www.sfexaminer.com/news/the-city/despite-shortages-and-surges-film-photographers-committed-to-the-analog-lifestyle/article_b8d6a352-2a34-11ed-8f1c-777ebb796795.html

Photography

Despite shortages and surges, film photographers committed to the analog lifestyle

By Adam Shanks | Examiner staff writer |

Sep 6, 2022

1 of 3



Vartan Demirjian, owner of Oscar's Photo Lab, says more companies supply film than previously but that it is becoming increasingly expensive.

Craig Lee/The Examiner

Radostina Boseva loves the blues and cyans of her favorite Fujicolor film so much, she named her dog after it.

Fuji the dog is still around, but Fujifilm Fujicolor PRO 400H was discontinued in 2021.

Boseva, a wedding and portrait photographer based in the Bay Area, is one of the many professional photographers and businesses burdened by the persistent shortage and rising cost of color film around the world.

While it once was ubiquitous and relatively cheap, color film has become harder to find in recent years, particularly since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. When it does hit shelves, the prices are high enough to give even a die-hard film photography buff pause — and maybe even reach for their iPhone before that old Pentax.

Manufacturers like Kodak and Fujifilm have blamed supply chain issues and heavy demand. Some enthusiasts believe the companies themselves are at fault — that they bet on film fading out of style and can no longer produce enough Gold and Superia to keep up with resurgent interest in the products.

“If people see an opportunity to make money, they’re going to do it, and people are willing to pay more for film,” said Vartan Demirjian, owner of Oscar’s Photo Lab in SoMa.

The supply shortage and discontinuation of certain film stocks force pros like Boseva to find new ways to achieve the same results she and her customers expect. When Fujifilm announced that 400H would be discontinued due to struggles sourcing raw material used in the film, the whole industry was shaken, and many longtime adherents to analog ditched it for digital.

“Literally, a lot of careers were based on that film,” Boseva said. “I was shocked to learn that people who were industry leaders, they just decided to just stop shooting film in general. The magic is gone in their work, for me. It’s just not there.”

That magic, to those who believe in it, is in the grainy texture and color of the analog format. Digital photographs can be edited in a way that strives for a film-like look, but film lovers say they spot the difference.

Boseva was forced to switch from Fujifilm to Kodak Portra 800, but it was a painstaking process. Kodak films accentuate warmer colors than the Fuji 400H, she explained. She spent hours working with Richard Photo Lab in Santa Clarita to process and scan Portra 800 in a way that mimicked Fuji 400H.

Its about money

Availability of film isn’t the only issue, it’s also the cost.

Photographer Samantha Look used to spend about \$40 to \$42 on a five-roll box of Portra film, but that quickly shot up to \$60 or more in less than two years.

Look isn’t quite sure what the breaking point is before a full embrace of digital — a realm in which the cost of a single shot is negligible — but she knows it exists.

Businesses like Oscar’s Photo Lab struggle to keep the films photographers love stocked on their shelves at a reasonable price.

“I worry more about the cost of film, as opposed to being able to get it,” said Demirjian, Oscar’s owner. “There’s more and more suppliers — there are companies that are coming out that are introducing film now, but it’s getting very expensive.”

Film photography blog Analog.Cafe built a price tracker that surveys the price of various films at major retailers. As of July, for example, a roll of Kodak Portra 800 was an average price of \$17.66, an increase of nearly a dollar since February.

Newcomers to the industry offer compelling alternatives to Kodak and Fujifilm, but they’re not exactly cheap, either. A roll of Cinestill, a company founded in Los Angeles a decade ago, sells its 800T color film for \$15 a roll.

Not only have film prices increased, but so has the cost of the chemicals that Oscar’s uses to process it, the paper on which it prints photographs, and a whole host of other facets of the business.

Oscar’s has tried to absorb all of these increases without dumping them onto the customer, but there’s a limit.

“It’s not elastic. We can’t just keep increasing prices, we’re cutting into our profit margin a great deal,” Demirjian said.

There was a period when Underdog Film Labs, based in Oakland, could only get its hands on Cinestill 800T, a film modified from a stock intended for use in motion pictures. Salesperson Matthew Hoang said everything is now back in stock — for the moment.

“Earlier this year it was just really slow, we wouldn’t get a lot in at a time,” Hoang said. “There would always be customers who would buy packs as soon as they could.”

Why film

So, if film is so pricey, and so laborious, why bother?

Boseva could have picked up a digital camera and abandoned film when Fujifilm dropped her beloved 400H. But she’d rather give up photography than go digital.

“Everything is sharp. It almost reminds me of an iPhone image. I respect digital, don’t get me wrong, I have to work with that, but it’s not the best thing, I feel,” she said.

Advanced photo editing software is rife with tools that attempt to reproduce the feel of film. Look admitted that her clients might not be able to tell the difference — but she can.

“I just love shooting with film, it feels more like an art form. You don’t get that instant feedback,” Look said. “It feels more like I’m creating art, it feels more deliberate.”

Hoang said the medium is attracting younger people.

“It’s like a matter of the rawness of it and the aesthetics,” Hoang said.

So, yes, film is a headache. But committed photographers in the Bay Area are sticking with it.

“You love film because of the grain, the nostalgia feeling, the blurriness even. All that. I just don’t want to fake it,” Boseva said.

Adam Shanks



LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HEARING DATE: OCTOBER 16, 2024

Filing Date: September 18, 2024
Case No.: 2024-008630LBR
Business Name: Oscar’s Photo Lab
Business Address: 790 BRANNAN ST
Zoning: SALI (SERVICE/ARTS/LIGHT INDUSTRIAL) Zoning District
 Western SoMa
 Priority Equity Geography SUD
 40/55-X Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 3779/024
Applicant: Vartan Demirjian
 790 Brannan Street
Nominated By: Supervisor Matt Dorsey
Located In: District 6
Staff Contact: Honora Montano - 628-652-7402
 Honora.Montano@sfgov.org

Recommendation: Adopt a Resolution to Recommend Approval

Business Description

Oscar’s Photo Lab is a photography lab providing services to amateur and professional photographers. The store was founded in 1982 by Noubar “Oscar” Demirjian, at 749 Larkin Street. For over a decade, from 1982 to 1993, the Larkin Street store became a beloved hub for photographers and amateurs alike, offering top-notch services. In 1993, Oscar’s Photo Lab relocated to 790 Brannan Street, where it has remained to this day. The move to Brannan Street marked a significant expansion for the business, allowing for greater capacity and a wider range of services. After the move, Oscar’s son Vartan Demirjian joined the business as a co-owner. In 2023, Oscar passed away, and Vartan became the sole owner of the business. As one of the last remaining photo labs in San Francisco, Oscar's Photo Lab not only provides essential photo services, but also serves as a hub for the photography community, offering guidance, expertise, and a sense of belonging.

In addition, Oscar's Photo Lab has built relationships with significant businesses, individuals, and organizations, including providing photo services to iconic San Francisco companies such as Levi Strauss & Co., The Gap, and Westin St. Francis Hotel. The lab has also provided photography services for official events, ceremonies, and promotional materials for various San Francisco governmental departments, including the Mayor's Office, Fire Department, and Police Department.

Staff Analysis

Review Criteria

1. When was business founded?

The business was founded in 1982.

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

Yes. Oscar's Photo Lab qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- a. Oscar's Photo Lab has operated continuously in San Francisco for 42 years.
- b. Oscar's Photo Lab has contributed to the history and identity of the South of Market neighborhood and San Francisco.
- c. Oscar's Photo Lab 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. Oscar's Photo Lab has played an integral role in preserving the memories and milestones of significant events and individuals in the Bay Area. These has include providing archival printing services for historical photographs and documents related to Golden Gate Bridge 50th Anniversary commemoration event. Additionally, Oscar's Photo Lab has collaborated with the San Francisco Chronicle archives, assisting in the preservation and digitization of invaluable historical photographs and articles. By providing expert printing and reproduction services, the lab has helped make these archival materials accessible to the public, contributing to the documentation of the city's rich history.

Oscar's Photo Lab has also worked closely with the San Francisco Longshoreman's Union (ILWU), providing printing services for their union archives. The Lab has also partnered with the San Francisco Public Library archives, assisting in the preservation of historical photographs and documents that are integral to the city's heritage. By providing expert printing services, the lab has helped make these archival materials accessible to researchers, historians, and the public, enriching our understanding of San Francisco's past. Finally, Oscar's Photo Lab has had the privilege of working with significant Bay Area photographers such as Ray "Scotty" Morris and Jim Marshall. These collaborations have involved printing and reproducing their iconic photographs,

ensuring that their artistic legacies continue to inspire audiences. Through its association with significant people and events, Oscar's Photo Lab has demonstrated its commitment to preserving and celebrating the cultural heritage of San Francisco and the Bay.

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, Oscar's Photo Lab was spotlighted in a San Francisco Examiner Article from September 2022 featuring both Noubar "Oscar" Demirjian and son, Vartan Demirjian. Years ago, Oscar's Photo Lab was hired to print a photo of Rosa Parks, which currently resides inside the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC.

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.

Oscar's Photo Lab identifies as an immigrant- and person of color owned-business. Through community photo education partnerships and efforts to support various archival and historic documentation efforts, Oscar's Photo Lab has demonstrated its commitment to preserving and celebrating the cultural heritage of San Francisco and the Bay Area. This includes providing resources and printing services to help young photographers develop their skills and creativity through First Exposures, a local San Francisco non-profit organization dedicated to empowering youth through photography. Oscar's Photo Lab also works closely with several schools in San Francisco, including St. Ignatius High School and KZV Armenian School. Through these partnerships and collaborations, Oscar's Photo Lab has made a positive impact on the community by empowering youth, supporting educational endeavors, and fostering creativity and artistic expression.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business

Location(s) associated with the business:

Current Locations:

- 790 Brannan Street (1993 to Present)

Previous (No Longer Extant) Locations:

- 749 Larkin Street (1982 to 1993)

Recommended by Applicant

- Photography lab services including film processing, printing, scanning, and archival services
- Preservation of memories through film
- Fostering creativity and artistic expression

Basis for Recommendation

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

ATTACHMENTS

Draft Resolution

Legacy Business Registry Application:

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



HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION DRAFT RESOLUTION NO.

HEARING DATE: OCTOBER 16, 2024

Case No.: 2024-008630LBR
Business Name: Oscar’s Photo Lab
Business Address: 790 BRANNAN ST
Zoning: SALI (SERVICE/ARTS/LIGHT INDUSTRIAL) Zoning District
 Western SoMa
 Priority Equity Geography SUD
 40/55-X Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 3779/024
Applicant: Vartan Demirjian
 790 Brannan Street
Nominated By: Supervisor Matt Dorsey
Located In: District 6
Staff Contact: Honora Montano - 628-652-7402
 Honora.Montano@sfgov.org

ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR OSCAR’S PHOTO LAB CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 790 BRANNAN ST., BLOCK/LOT 3779/024.

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 October 15, 2024, 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 OSCAR'S PHOTO LAB 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 OSCAR'S PHOTO LAB.

Location(s):

Current Locations:

- 790 Brannan Street (1993 to Present)

Previous (No Longer Extant) Locations:

- 749 Larkin Street (1982 to 1993)

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Photography lab services including film processing, printing, scanning, and archival services
- Preservation of memories through film
- Fostering creativity and artistic expression

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 on October 16, 2024.

Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

RECUSE:

ADOPTED: October 16, 2024.