

### Signage: A History Lesson

Throughout the course of my first year in San Francisco, the different culture specific districts have caught my attention and opened my eyes to all the ethnic diversity in this city. Migration from all over the world has made San Francisco one of the most unique cities in the world. U.S. News and World Report even named the City by the Bay fourth on its list of “The World’s Best Places to Visit”, coming just after Paris, Barcelona and London. The Spanish were the first to come through San Francisco, arriving in 1769, and settled in what is today the Mission district, but after the discovery of gold in 1848, people from all over Asia and Europe migrated to the city in search of jobs and wealth (Brook). Each migrating group brought its own rich culture and beliefs to California and established communities in the Bay Area that are now thriving societies, as well as popular tourist locations.

Like it is in many other cities, the advertising in San Francisco is enormous. Because San Francisco is so diverse and is also a popular tourist location, there is a wide variety of people that come through the city, so advertisers need to consider how much greater their audience is. When there are advertisements in historic culture specific locations, such as the Mission, North Beach and Chinatown, so much more needs to be taken into consideration. In areas such as these, advertisers can be extremely specific or broad when choosing a certain audience, depending on what they are advertising and what location the advertisement will be at.

Mission Dolores was established upon the arrival of the Spanish in San Francisco and is the reason for the naming of the Mission District and Dolores Park. The Mission district reflects the initial desire of the Spanish to spread Christianity (Cleary). There is a restaurant called “Gracias Madre” and the Mission is full of churches, both big and small. In addition to religiously affiliated establishments, the Mission is also popular for its large thrift and discounts stores, and of course, its authentic Mexican food. Because the Mission is San Francisco’s oldest district, its many eateries range widely in age. There are brand new taquerias right next to old, hole in the wall favorites and while the Mission is populated with mostly Mexican restaurants, there are also a lot of Spanish bakeries and chain fast food stores scattered in the Mission. Though there is not a lot of diversity when it comes to types of food, one of the older-looking and certainly more popular eateries in the district does not even serve Mexican food. Yamo is a run-down Burmese restaurant that does not at all match the district it is located in, but newspaper and magazine clippings posted in the small shop’s window boast that it is a San Francisco favorite. The signage that marks this restaurant’s front is interesting. The main sign reads “YAMO” in simple letters with minimal coloring, but on the side of the window are colorful, hand painted cats eating noodles. This signage seems to be just as old as the name sign because of how weathered and chipped it is. Yamo, though it is not very visually appealing and is extremely tiny, is able to remain in business because of its low prices and good food. Yamo’s customers do not mind that the venue is older and was even said to be dirty on Yelp.com, but the poor ambiance is out weighed by food costs and quality.

Another food sign in the Mission is advertising Kuuup, a relatively new Mexican food venue. This restaurant is on the newer side, though its signage is designed to look



like ancient Mayan statues and detail with intricate designs and faux cracks that really add to the archaic feeling the sign's designers were aiming toward. This sign forwardly states the food Kuuup has to offer, while Yamo's sign discloses no

information regarding what the restaurant serves. Kuuup is one of many, many Mexican

eateries in the Mission, but part of what drew my attention to the sign really is the cheesy ancient look the signage has. Personally, I am not a fan of the sign visually, but it still did what it was supposed to and captured my attention.

Immigration from Italy to San Francisco started in the early 1800s with the initial allure of Bay Area fishing and the desire to spread Christianity to the west coast. When gold was discovered, even more Italians came to San Francisco and eventually, North Beach was created as another one of the many "Little Italy" communities that were developing all over the east and west coasts of the United States (Accardi). Little Italy became a part of the Barbary Coast's red-light district, which also included the Financial District and Chinatown. There are still lively bars, nightclubs and other entertainment establishments in Little Italy that were a part of nightlife in the red-light district during the late 1800s and early 1900s (Accardi). The Hungry i Nightclub opened in 1950 and staged great musical talents such as Barbara Streisand and Vince Guaraldi and comics



Ronnie Schell and Bill Crosby. It boasts “topless entertainment” and “the best girls in town” and still has the look and feel of entertainment venues from when North Beach was an active part of the Barbary Coast route and considered the red-light district. Though the drinking

and dancing venues are still very popular, Little Italy is no longer considered a dangerous and sketchy area, but rather a collection of old and new restaurants, European boutiques and quaint cafes. It has become a beloved district to San Francisco natives, as well as one of the city’s most popular tourist locations (Little Italy San Francisco).



The advertisement that stood out the most to me in Little Italy was one that is playing off the red-light district and its adult entertainment venues. Designed to look like it is illuminated with show lights, the advertisement reads in large, bold letters” TOPLESS THRILLS OPEN 24 HOURS”. It was a sign near a fairly busy intersection in North Beach, along a sidewalk lining Washington Square Park and on

the side of a busy bus stop. On the other side of this advertisement is the “topless thrill” and upon the press of a button on this technologically advanced bus stop’s touch screen, virtual red velvet curtains are drawn to expose a convertible Mini Cooper. This advertisement is brand new signage to San Francisco and is installed on touch screen bus stops that were only put up last year.

Shortly after the first Italians immigrated to San Francisco, Chinese also moved to the Bay Area in the early 1860s to work in gold mines and on the Transcontinental Railroad. The district we now know as Chinatown was land set aside for Chinese immigrants by the government and was the only area in which they were allowed to own land and live, so naturally, businesses and restaurants were established. Since the original



immigration of Chinese to San Francisco, Chinatown and the city's Chinese population exploded, becoming the largest Chinatown outside of China itself and Chinese making up an estimated 20% of San Francisco (Brook).

The Chinese are famous for knowing recipes to herbal, home made remedies for all kinds of sores, illnesses and ailments, and with such a large district, there are a variety of herbal

medicine stores that line the streets of Chinatown. These stores range from fairly new to very old, but they manage to survive next to each other. The signage to the right is advertising one of Chinatown's many herbal remedy stores, and it is clear from the condition of the sign that the store is older. Everything on the sign is painted in hand-written Chinese except "American Ginseng" written on the bottom. This sign, though it is mostly in Chinese, can be easily recognized as a health care store because of the large root that takes up nearly half of the entire sign. To a Chinese-speaking Chinatown local, it is even more clear what this sign is advertising, but to a tourist visiting from Nevada, the herbs depicted on the sign are likely to be enough of an indication as to what the store behind it is selling. In comparison, a much more modern, computerized sign advertising the Ben Le Xie Clinic publicizes all that can be done with the assistance of Chinese herbal medicine. Auto accident? Knee, neck or back pain? Coughing and acne? This

