

HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION  
CITY LANDMARK DESIGNATION  
STAFF REPORT

ARNOLDI'S RESTAURANT  
600 OLIVE STREET  
SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA  
APN 031-171-006

**Background:**

The distinctive, ashlar cut sandstone building on the corner of Olive and Cota Streets was constructed in 1940 by Giuseppe (Joe) Arnoldi, a noted Italian stonemason in Santa Barbara. Joe and his wife ran the restaurant together until they retired in 1969. Although the Italian restaurant has changed ownership, it has remained Arnoldi's, a center of the Italian culture in Santa Barbara.

The building has been on the Potential Historic Resources List since 1990. Because the building retains almost all of its original design and materials, is a rare example of a complete sandstone building, and has remained a center of the Italian culture that once dominated this neighborhood of the city, it is important to Santa Barbara's cultural heritage. The building meets five of the City Landmark eligibility criteria for its quality of materials and historical significance, and it is the opinion of the Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) Designations Subcommittee that the building is an excellent candidate for City Landmark designation.



*The Arnoldi's restaurant with its distinctive ashlar cut sandstone walls. The stone was quarried and cut by Joe Arnoldi himself. The restaurant has been a center of the Italian culture in Santa Barbara since 1940. Photo taken February 2, 2017*

Red line indicates proposed boundary of the City Landmark designation, which includes the Arnoldi's building and rear courtyard and bocce court. There are two house facing Cota Street on the parcel that are not included as they are not part of the historic significance of the Arnoldi's restaurant.

*Vicinity Map*



*Vicinity Map, City of Santa Barbara Mapping Analysis and Printing System, 2013*

**Historic Context:**

Arnoldi's is located east of downtown in the Laguna neighborhood. The Laguna neighborhood was dotted with a number of small farms and a scattering of houses until the Southern Pacific Company built a large rail yard at the base of Garden Street in 1904-05. The Laguna neighborhood began to develop with modest vernacular and Craftsman style houses built for tradesmen and the working class. By the end of the 1920s, the 600 block of Olive Street, where Arnoldi's was constructed in 1940, had become an enclave of working-class families, many of them first- and second-generation Italians who had first begun to settle Santa Barbara in the late 1890s.



*Above: The wood windows are deeply recessed in the thick sandstone wall. February 2, 2016.*

While many of the Italians worked as laborers, stonemasons, and in various service industries, some owned small businesses, such as Mom's Italian Village on West Cota Street, which opened in 1933, and Arnoldi's Café on the corner of Cota and Olive Streets, which opened in 1940. Beginning in the postwar years, the demographics of the Laguna neighborhood changed when many members of the Italian community began to move to the newly popular tract developments in outlying suburbs. Arnoldi's remains as a testament to the once Italian neighborhood and represents the importance of the influence of the Italian culture in Santa Barbara.

Joe Arnoldi was a stonemason from the Lake Como region in northern Italy. He came to Santa Barbara in 1921 and brought over his fiancée, Ilda Gottardi, a year later. In 1936, Joe and Ilda leased a restaurant as a prelude to the current location of Arnoldi's. Joe quarried the local sandstone and built their family restaurant himself. Built entirely of ashlar cut sandstone blocks with a terra-cotta tile, hipped roof, and deeply recessed, eight-over-eight windows, Arnoldi's demonstrates high-quality materials and craftsmanship. In addition, Arnoldi's features the original bocce ball court that was installed in 1940 when the restaurant opened and still draws Santa Barbara bocce players. In 1953 the sign flanked by 7up signs was installed at Arnoldi's. Historic signs give continuity to public spaces, becoming part of the community memory. Arnoldi's has become an icon of the Italian culture and remains a popular restaurant today.

The use of masonry for construction in the Santa Barbara area dates back to the time the Spanish arrived. Since it was necessary to travel some distance into the woods to obtain lumber, stone became the preferred building material. This method of construction was often chosen because local brown sandstone was readily available and easily transformed from round or shapeless boulders into symmetrical, smooth-faced stone for building purposes. Stones were cut and incorporated into the original Santa Barbara Mission structures, although most of the early buildings and walls of the Mission were made of adobe. After the Mission was badly damaged in the earthquake of 1812, thick walls of sandstone were incorporated into the towers.

In the years from 1870 to 1940, when Santa Barbara was quickly evolving into a vibrant, growing city, the period witnessed an extraordinary explosion of stone construction made possible by the abundant supply of sandstone, cadre of expert masons, and financing by private citizens. This period provided an atmosphere conducive to the building of public and private spaces of all kinds, bridges, walls, gardens, and an assortment of other stone works and encouraged some exceptional expressions of the masons' art. In the early 1900s, as Santa Barbara was developing this important infrastructure, masons took



*Above: The restaurant was constructed with high-quality materials, including terra-cotta roof tiles; simple, rounded, wood brackets under the eaves; and ashlar cut sandstone walls. Photo taken February 2, 2016.*

advantage of the opportunity to display a variety of styles and approaches. In doing so, they created and maintained a high standard for excellence in stonework, one that has lasted over a century.

Beginning in the 1870s, the first group of masons to work in Santa Barbara came from a variety of national origins, including England, Scotland, Germany, France, Italy, and Mexico. The next generation consisted primarily of Italians, particularly from the Lake Como region. Joe and Ilda, who built Arnoldi's, were from Lake Como, and there is a mural in the restaurant of Lake Como. This generation was followed by an influx of skilled stonemasons from Mexico, who continued to add to the varieties of stonework in the region. Each group of stone builders has added its distinctive touch to the tradition of stonework and contributed its own elements to the particular ambience that helps make Santa Barbara a special place.

**Significance:**

The City of Santa Barbara defines historic significance as outlined by the Municipal Code, Section 22.22.040. It is the opinion of the Historic Landmarks Commission Designations Subcommittee that Arnoldi's, at 600 Olive Street, is an excellent candidate for City Landmark designation per the following five criteria:

***Criterion A. Its character, interest or value as a significant part of the heritage of the City, the State or the Nation***

This building is an excellent example of a commercial building constructed entirely of Santa Barbara sandstone. There are only a few examples of Santa Barbara sandstone buildings in the City. Additionally, the building has remained the Arnoldi's restaurant since it opened in 1940 and is a center of Italian culture. It represents the Italian working-class culture in Santa Barbara and qualifies as a City Landmark because it is a significant part of the heritage of the City.



***Above: Cota Street elevation of Arnoldi's also has the cut stone walls with deeply set wood windows. Photo taken February 2, 2017.***

***Criterion D. Its exemplification of a particular architectural style or way of life important to the City, the State, or the Nation***

The building exemplifies the Italian culture of Santa Barbara and the work of the famous Italian stone masons, an important part of life in Santa Barbara in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

***Criterion F. Its identification as the creation, design or work of a person or persons whose effort has significantly influenced the heritage of the City, the State or the Nation***

The building was built by Joe Arnoldi, a noted stone mason in Santa Barbara since he arrived to Santa Barbara in 1921 from Lake Cuomo, Italy. The Italian stone masons are noted in Santa Barbara for their excellently cut stonework dating from the late 1800s to early 1900s that continues to characterize the City. Arnoldi's represents the creation of Joe Arnoldi, who significantly influenced the heritage of Santa Barbara.

***Criterion G. Its embodiment of elements demonstrating outstanding attention to architectural design, detail, materials and craftsmanship***

Built entirely of ashlar cut, sandstone blocks with a terra-cotta tile, hipped roof with simple round wood brackets under the eaves and deeply recessed, eight-over-eight, wood windows, Arnoldi's demonstrates high-quality materials and craftsmanship.

***Criterion I. Its unique location or singular physical characteristic representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood***

Arnoldi's has been operating as an Italian restaurant in the sandstone building at the corner of Cota and Olive Streets since 1940. It was a center of the Italian neighborhood when constructed and has become a gathering place for Italian food and bocce ball lovers of Santa Barbara since that time. Thus, the sandstone restaurant is a familiar visual feature to the Laguna neighborhood.

**Historic Integrity:**

Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its original appearance. There are essential physical features that must be considered to evaluate the integrity of a significant building. Since 1940, the Arnoldi's building has had high integrity of location, association, and feeling. The original design, materials, and workmanship have been retained so that the building conveys its original 1940 appearance. Thus, the building has retained a high level of historical integrity.

**Recommendation:**

The HLC Designations Subcommittee and staff recommend that the HLC adopt a resolution to recommend to City Council that the Arnoldi's building be designated as a City Landmark. Staff recommends the proposed boundary of the City Landmark designation include the Arnoldi's building and rear courtyard and bocce court. There are two house facing Cota Street on the parcel that are not included as they are not part of the historic significance of the Arnoldi's restaurant. The signage is a character-defining feature of the building and should be retained.

**Works Cited:**

- Auer, Michael J. "The Preservation of Historic Signs". *Preservation Briefs*. National Park Service. U.S. Department of the Interior.
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- Santa Barbara Conservancy, *Images of America, Stone Architecture in Santa Barbara*. Arcadia Publishing, 2009.