

Legacy Business Registry Staff Report

HEARING DATE MAY 29, 2019

DISTRACTIONS

Application No.: LBR-2016-17-005
Business Name: Distractions
Business Address: 1552 Haight Street
District: District 5
Applicant: James Siegel, Owner
Nomination Date: August 9, 2016
Nominated By: Then-Supervisor London Breed
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Distractions is a retail store founded by James Siegel in June 1982 at 1692 Haight Street in a Victorian building owned by the Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic. The store was originally geared to the large gay market that was spilling over from the Castro at the time. The Haight was being renovated mainly by gay pioneers who were buying up the dilapidated Victorians and opening other gay shops and bars and night clubs such as the I Beam. Siegel decorated it in the "high tech" style of the day with blacks and gray. The store featured clothing and gifts and cards, with some smoking paraphernalia. Distractions also catered to local artists and was known for their monthly gallery openings focusing on young, local gay artists.

In 1989, a fire forced Siegel to move the shop to its current location at 1552 Haight Street. He used the opportunity to change the focus of the store a go back to his hippie roots to cater to the Grateful Dead crowd, selling tie dyes and Guatemalan imported clothing. In 1994, Siegel changed the store again to cater to youthful fans of Electronic Dance Music. He converted the back room into a record and CD store and started selling tickets to the various local raves. Around 2010, the store began to have more of a Victorian and Steampunk look that was popular at Burning Man and began offering locally crafted good that cater to the counter-culture and festival communities.

The business is located on the north side of Haight Street between Ashby and Clayton streets in the Haight-Ashbury 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?

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

1692 Haight Street from 1982 to 1989 (7 years)
1552 Haight Street from 1989 to Present (30 years)





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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

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

Yes, Distractions has contributed to the history and identity of the Haight-Ashbury 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:

- Distractions is associated with the counter culture history and traditions of the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. It is also associated with the Burning Man Festival.
The property is located within the California Register-eligible Haight-Ashbury Historic District. The property has a Planning Department Historic Resource status of "A" (Historic Resource Present) because of its location within the eligible historic district.
For over three decades, Distractions has enjoyed much media attention as an icon of the counter-culture community. Distractions has also been written about in many news stories, some included in the Legacy Business Registry application. The store is listed in the Haight-Ashbury Map & Guide published by Rufus Guides. Over the years it has been mentioned in travel books and airline magazines about San Francisco. Jim Siegel was recently interviewed by CNN International for a special on the Haight and his historic home on Alamo Square, the William Westerfeld House, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is San Francisco Landmark Number 135. The CNN International show is called Quest for Adventure. In May 2016, then-Supervisor London Breed presented Jim Siegel with a Certificate of Honor to commemorate his 40th year in business as a continual Haight Street merchant.

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

Yes, Distractions is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the organization.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

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

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Rotating murals by local artists.
Edwardian-era exterior building features.
Original hardwood floors, original doors, moldings, and Lincrusta wall finishes.
An inventory of clothing and goods associated with the artistic counter-culture, including.
High-quality Neo-Victorian and Steampunk wear.
Smoke shop.

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.

- Clothing store.





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STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Small Business Commission include Distractions currently located at 1552 Haight Street 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 MAY 29, 2019

DISTRACTIONS

LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY RESOLUTION NO. _____

Application No.: LBR-2016-17-005
Business Name: Distractions
Business Address: 1552 Haight Street
District: District 5
Applicant: James Siegel, Owner
Nomination Date: August 9, 2016
Nominated By: Then-Supervisor London Breed
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

ADOPTING FINDINGS APPROVING THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY APPLICATION FOR DISTRACTIONS, CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 1552 HAIGHT STREET.

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 May 29, 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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BE IT RESOLVED that the Small Business Commission hereby includes Distractions 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 Distractions:

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Rotating murals by local artists.
Edwardian-era exterior building features.
Original hardwood floors, original doors, moldings, and Lincrusta wall finishes.
An inventory of clothing and goods associated with the artistic counter-culture, including.
High-quality Neo-Victorian and Steampunk wear.
Smoke shop.

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

- Clothing store.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Small Business Commission on May 29, 2019.

Regina Dick-Endrizzi
Director

RESOLUTION NO. _____

- Ayes -
Nays -
Abstained -
Absent -





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**Legacy
Business
Registry**

Application Review Sheet

Application No.: LBR-2016-17-005
Business Name: Distractions
Business Address: 1552 Haight Street
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Applicant: James Siegel, Owner
Nomination Date: August 9, 2016
Nominated By: Then-Supervisor London Breed

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? X Yes No

1692 Haight Street from 1982 to 1989 (7 years)
 1552 Haight Street from 1989 to Present (30 years)

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

NOTES: N/A

DELIVERY DATE TO HPC: April 17, 2019

Richard Kurylo
Program Manager, Legacy Business Program



**President, Board of Supervisor
District 5**



City and County of San Francisco

LONDON N. BREED

Tuesday, August 9th, 2016

Rick Kurylo
Legacy Business Program Manager
Office of Small Business
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, Suite 110
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Mr. Kurylo:

I am writing to proudly nominate Distractions at 1552 Haight Street for the Legacy Business Registry Program. Distractions has been a fixture of the Haight-Ashbury community since its founding in June 1982.

As the iconic shop on Haight Street with a display of vintage clothes and accessories, Distractions has kept the counter culture of the Haight-Ashbury alive and active by the products it sells and the events it sponsors and promotes. During the 1990s, the store stayed active in the rave dance community by producing and supporting local events. From 1999 to 2013, it served as the local ticket outlet for the Burning Man Festival. Moreover, the unique items sold from Distractions attract residents and visitors from around the world, which promotes local businesses and improves the vitality of the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood.

The founder, Mr. Jim Siegel, has been an institution in the Haight-Ashbury. As a businessman and a leader of the community for the past 40 years, he is known by many as the "Godfather of Haight Street." As a current member of the Haight Ashbury Merchant Association, his leadership ensures that the merchants in this neighborhood are getting the support they need to thrive in San Francisco.

Please contact Mr. Siegel at distractionsonhaight@gmail.com. Feel free to contact my office if you have any questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "London Breed".

President London Breed
Board of Supervisors
City & County of San Francisco

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:		
Distractions		
BUSINESS OWNER(S) (identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business)		
James Oliver Siegel III		
CURRENT BUSINESS ADDRESS:		TELEPHONE:
1552 Haight STREET		(415) 252-8751
San Francisco, CA 94117		EMAIL:
		distractions_sf@yahoo.com
WEBSITE:	FACEBOOK PAGE:	YELP PAGE:
distractions_sf.com		

APPLICANT'S NAME	
James Siegel	<input type="checkbox"/> Same as Business
APPLICANT'S TITLE	
owner	
APPLICANT'S ADDRESS:	TELEPHONE:
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
	EMAIL:
	distractions_sf@yahoo.com

SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS ACCOUNT NUMBER:	SECRETARY OF STATE ENTITY NUMBER (if applicable):
0136249	

OFFICIAL USE: Completed by OSB Staff	
NAME OF NOMINATOR:	DATE OF NOMINATION:

Section One:

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
1692 Haight ST.	94117	June 1982
IS THIS LOCATION THE FOUNDING LOCATION OF THE BUSINESS?		DATES OF OPERATION AT THIS LOCATON
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes		June 1982 - Sept 1989
OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
1552 Haight ST. San Francisco CA	94117	Start: JAN 1989 End: still Here
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: End:
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.

James Siegel III 2-21-19 James Siegel

Name (Print): Date: Signature:

DBA: Distractions

DISTRACTIONS

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.

Distractions, located at 1552 Haight Street in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, was founded by James ("Jim") Siegel in June 1982.

Jim first arrived in San Francisco in June 1972 and has been an active member of the Haight-Ashbury counter-culture community since his arrival. He was attracted to the Haight by the lore of the hippie movement that first began in the neighborhood in the mid-1960s. By the early 1970s, Haight-Ashbury was a rundown, derelict neighborhood with a 40 percent commercial vacancy rate. Crime was high, and Jim was robbed often. But he decided to stay and make the neighborhood great once again.

Jim joined the volunteer staff at the Haight-Ashbury Switchboard, which was a group dedicated to helping the community by offering crash housing, running a 24/7 drop in center at 1797 Haight Street and helping people with housing, health, jobs and ride referrals.

In May 1976 at the age of 20, Jim teamed up with two partners to open The White Rabbit at 1409 Haight Street. It was one of only a handful of retail stores open on Haight Street at that time because the street was still derelict. They catered to what was left of the original hippie crowd, selling plants, pet supplies and marijuana smoking paraphernalia. Partnership problems arose, so in May 1978 Jim opened his second Haight Street shop with two friends called Pipe Dreams.

Pipe Dreams was strictly a "head shop" selling smoking wares to the Haight's marijuana enthusiast crowd while being pioneers of marijuana legalization. Having further difficulties with business partners, Jim branched off solo in June 1982 to open Distractions as a sole proprietor. Distractions was to be a different type of store. While still carrying some marijuana accessory products, the store was more geared to the large gay market that was spilling over from the Castro at the time. The Haight was being renovated mainly by gay pioneers who were buying up the dilapidated Victorians and opening other gay shops and bars and night clubs such as the I-Beam.

The original Distractions was located in a Victorian building owned by the Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic located at 1692 Haight Street by the corner of Haight and Cole. Jim decorated it in the "high tech" style of the day with blacks and gray instead of the bright, psychedelic colors of his two previous stores. He was 26 years old at the time and identified with the gay hippie youth of

the neighborhood, so Distractions catered to them. The store featured clothing and gifts and cards, with some smoking paraphernalia. Distractions also catered to local artists and was known for their monthly gallery openings focusing on young, local gay artists. Distractions was located at 1692 Haight Street from 1982 until 1989.

In 1988, a developer named John Brennon tried to build a Thrifty Drug store on the site of the old Straight Theater at the corner of Haight and Cole streets directly across the street from Distractions. The neighborhood was upset and not having any part of this gentrification in the Haight. On the night of September 22, 1988, Jim was awoken from his home on Alamo Square by the sirens from a 5-alarm fire. He looked out his window to see flames hundreds of feet above the trees in the Panhandle Park. By the time he arrived at Haight and Cole, 10 buildings were completely engulfed in flames including Distractions. An arsonist had placed 10 gallons of gasoline in the Thrifty Drug building, and the resulting fire became a conflagration jumping three corners of the Haight and Cole intersection.

Distractions had to close for several months to deal with the insurance company, but Jim still had weekend fire sales in the doorway of 1692 Haight Street to keep his presence alive. Realizing that repairs would take a while, he bought the lease of an old Chinese run grocery store in 1989 called the Bargain Market located at 1552 Haight Street near Ashbury. Jim changed the focus of the new Distractions, going back to his hippie roots and catering to the Grateful Dead crowd. Distractions was back to selling tie dyes and Guatemalan imported clothing that was popular with Deadheads. Distractions was very loved by the Grateful Dead community, and it was a community with 10,000 people traveling to San Francisco for each Dead show. The store served the Deadheads until 1994 when Jim decided that Jerry Garcia's heroin addiction made him a poor role model for his fans who idolized him.

In 1994, Jim changed Distractions' persona once again. The counter-culture was evolving, so he decided to cater the store to youthful fans of the Electronic Dance Music community. While the clothing they sold stayed psychedelic, gone were the tie dyes and in were fractal and holographic inspired clothing. Jim also converted the back room into a record and CD store. He started selling tickets to the various local raves, and this drew a loyal following to Distractions.

Around 2010, Jim resigned Distractions to have more of a Victorian and Steampunk look. This style was popular at Burning Man and was what the original hippies and rock bands in the Haight-Ashbury circa 1965 wore. The style is popular with circus acts such as San Francisco's Vaudevire Society who put on the yearly Edwardian Ball. People who attend the Dickens Fair also find their authentic vintage Victorian and Edwardian clothing at Distractions.

The look of Distractions today reflects the Burning Man artist community. The store sells handcrafted Black Iris hair pieces, leather hats by Steampunk Hatter, leather goods from Subverse, Compass Rose jewelry, Tracy Holcomb leather and jewelry, James Freeborn custom designed suits and Korrupt Label clothing by Oakland artist Henry. All of these are local Bay Area artists that cater to the counter-culture and festival communities.

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

Distractions had to close for several months after the fire on the night of September 22, 1988.

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

With Jim Siegel as a sole proprietor, Distractions is not technically a family-owned business, defined here as any business in which two or more family members are involved and the majority of ownership or control lies within a family.

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

Not applicable. James Oliver Siegel III has been the sole owner of Distractions since the business was founded in June 1982.

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.

Distractions is located at 1552 Haight Street in a three story Edwardian building built in 1904. The building is classified by the Planning Department as Category A, Historic Resource Present, with regard to the California Environmental Quality Act and is a contributor to the Haight-Ashbury Historic District. Originally, a flat occupied the ground floor space but was converted to a storefront in the first decade of 1900. There are two tenant occupied flats on the upper floors.

Haight-Ashbury is made up of late Victorian and Edwardian buildings. It was originally a streetcar suburb of downtown. Jim takes pride in the architectural history of the Haight and actively does all he can to preserve it. He has always been known as a preservationist and has restored many Victorians in the area including his personal home, the William Westerfeld House on Alamo Square, which is on the National Register and is a San Francisco landmark.

CRITERION 2

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

Distractions has always been a proud part of the Haight-Ashbury community that the store serves. Distractions loves the diversity and free spirit of the Haight and the colorful tourists that the neighborhood attracts. Today the Haight is a liberal and progressive, left leaning neighborhood. Distractions embraces the wealthy Victorian property owners, the tenants in rent control apartments, as well as the hundreds of homeless the neighborhood attracts and everyone else in between. Distractions has several elderly homeless men that they help financially, spiritually and with friendly support and guidance. Haight-Ashbury still attracts thousands of tourists attracted to the hippie roots of the Haight, and Distractions still cherishes those values 52 years after the Summer of Love.

Distractions has always been associated with the values and morals of the original Haight-Ashbury hippie movement. The Haight's hippies did change the world for today through the ecology movement, women and gay movements, the peace movement and the quest for freedom of artistic expression that the original hippies championed. Jim chose the Haight as his personal home and home of his businesses for he holds the values of the original Haight-Ashbury hippies dear to his heart to this day.

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

Distractions and Jim Siegel have been involved with many significant events. From 1989 to 1994, Distractions was very loved by the Grateful Dead community, which consisted of roughly 10,000 people traveling to San Francisco for each Dead show.

By the mid-1990s, Jim Siegel was throwing rave parties that he promoted at the store. In 1995, a group including Jim called the Consortium of Collective Consciousness (CCC) threw the first Electronic Dance at the Burning Man Festival. This was the start of a long history with the Burning Man Organization that Distractions still enjoys today.

By 1999, Jim had formed a radio and production company called Thump Radio. He had a weekly radio show on KUSF that Distractions sponsored. They also threw monthly dance parties at 550 Barneveld and The DNA Lounge and sold the tickets exclusively at Distractions. This led to the building of the first Rave Village at Burning Man in 1999, and Burning Man made Distractions its first San Francisco ticket outlet. The store sold tickets from 1999 until 2012 when the event grew so big that the Burning Man organization decided to just sell tickets online. Distractions still enjoys a great relationship with the organization, and Distractions is the only San Francisco location to sell Burning Man's yearly poster and calendars. Distractions has a huge, loyal following among the Burning Man community, so much so that Distractions makes 25% of its yearly income during the three weeks before the festival in late August. Distractions makes

yearly contributions to Burning Man's Artumnal Gathering fundraiser for the arts, and the Distractions staff still regularly attends the festival.

Distractions has also been involved with the Haight Street Fair, 420 events in Golden Gate Park, the Dickens Fair and the Edwardian Ball. Jim has used the store's windows to promote his Victorian preservation efforts including leading the charge to save the Fallon Building at 1800 Market from demolition as well as collecting petitions in the store to save endangered Victorians and stop Urban Outfitters from opening a mega store on Haight. Jim worked with then-Supervisor Matt Gonzalez to help establish the Formula Retail Ordinance to protect small mom-and-pop stores from chain stores.

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

For over three decades, Distractions has enjoyed much media attention as an icon of the counter-culture community. Distractions has also been written about in many news stories, some included in the Legacy Business Registry application. The store is listed in the Haight-Ashbury Map & Guide published by Rufus Guides. Over the years it has been mentioned in travel books and airline magazines about San Francisco.

Jim Siegel was recently interviewed by CNN International for a special on the Haight and his historic home on Alamo Square, the William Westerfeld House, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is San Francisco Landmark Number 135. The CNN International show is called Quest for Adventure. In May 2016, then-Supervisor London Breed presented Jim Siegel with a Certificate of Honor to commemorate his 40th year in business as a continual Haight Street merchant.

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

Distractions has been associated with many historical people including icons of the original hippie movement such as Timothy Leary, poster artist Stanley Mouse and visionary artist and author Alex Gray. Most of San Francisco's pioneer rock stars have shopped here: members of Jefferson Airplane, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Led Zeppelin and Carlos Santana. In 1989, when Distractions was focusing on Jim's hippie roots and catering to the Grateful Dead crowd, the store sold tie dyes created by local artist James Preston who had created an album cover for the Grateful Dead.

Distractions dresses many famous rock musicians such as Primus, Lukas Nelson, Parliament-Funkadelic and others that love the unique clothing that only Distractions offers. Current rock stars such as Lukas Nelson, Primus, Simone Posford of Sphongle and numerous electronic musicians such as Bass Nector also shop at Distractions.

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

Jim Siegel has been active in the revitalization of the Haight since the early 1970s. He did community volunteer work, bought several Haight Street Victorians and restored them and operated retail stores in the mid-1970s when the Haight was actually a dangerous place to be.

Distractions has continually demonstrated a commitment to preserving the values of the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. The store is known for having signs in its windows opposing chain stores, gentrification and demolition of Victorian buildings. They actively collect petitions for causes they believe in. Jim started two of the merchant associations over the past decades and has been an active member of Haight-Ashbury Neighborhood Council for years.

Distractions donates to neighborhood schools, Larkin Street Youth Services and Taking It To The Streets.

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

Distractions serves customers from Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco and beyond including residents and tourists. The store is popular with the counter-culture, Burning Man and Steampunk communities, as well as artists and musicians.

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

Since Distractions has occupied 1552 Haight Street, Jim has always supported local artists by having murals painted in front of the shop. In 1989, a local artist named Eugene painted a Guatemalan tapestry on the front when the store crated to the Grateful Dead crowd. In the early 1990s, Jason Norelli painted a bright colorful mural during the store's Rave period. The current mural that depicts Victorian San Francisco was painted by homeless artist Spencer Grey and added to by long Haight resident David Wills.

Although the building is covered in asbestos shingles, some Edwardian details remain. Jim has convinced his landlords to retain the one over one original windows, as well as the hardwood floors they wanted to cover with linoleum, and to retain the original doors, mouldings and Lincrusta they wanted to remove.

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

Distractions has played an important role in the Haight-Ashbury community. The store supports the arts and local artists and is active in neighborhood politics. Employees of Distractions are told on a daily basis that the store is the customers' favorite store on Haight Street.

Jim Siegel opened his first store, White Rabbit, to keep the spirit of the Haight alive in 1976 on the week the last hippie shop from the 1960s known as The Phoenix closed down. Bob Stubbs, the owner of the Phoenix, gave Jim his remaining fixtures and merchandise so that Jim could

keep a hippie influenced shop open on Haight at a time the neighborhood was in shambles. As a pioneering counter-culture business, Jim feels that the Haight would be adversely affected should Distractions close. Distractions represents the values of the original hippies, marijuana enthusiast, festival goers, Burning Man attendees and the LGBT community, and after 37 years people expect Distractions to be here. Jim rarely advertises as Distractions is a fixture in the Haight community. Also, as one of the only stores in San Francisco selling Victorian, Edwardian and Steampunk clothing, attendees of Burning Man, the Edwardian Ball and the Dickens Fair would be at a loss to find appropriate attire should Distractions close.

Distractions helps to keep the artistic counter-culture alive through the goods they sell and as a community meeting spot. After 43 years of running shops in Haight-Ashbury, people just expect to see Jim Siegel on Haight Street. He is a fixture there and part of the lore. Jim believes that Distractions would be conspicuous in its absence should he ever choose to close the store.

CRITERION 3

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

Distractions specializes in high-quality Neo-Victorian and Steampunk wear. You can find top hats, pocket watches, vests, corsets, festival wear needs and many other accoutrements. The store sells handcrafted Black Iris hair pieces, leather hats by Steampunk Hatter, leather goods from Subverse, Compass Rose jewelry, Tracy Holcomb leather and jewelry, James Freeborn custom designed suits and Korrupt Label clothing by Oakland artist Henry. All of these are local Bay Area artists that cater to the counter-culture and festival communities. Distractions is a second hand licensed shop with a smoke shop in the back.

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)

Distractions is committed to maintaining its historical tradition as clothes store and smoke shop featuring high-quality clothing, accoutrements, second-hand clothes and smoking paraphernalia.

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.).

Distractions is committed to maintaining the tradition of having murals painted in front of the shop as well as Edwardian details of the building, such as the original windows, the hardwood floors, the original doors, the mouldings and the Lincrusta.

d. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30years; 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.

Not applicable.

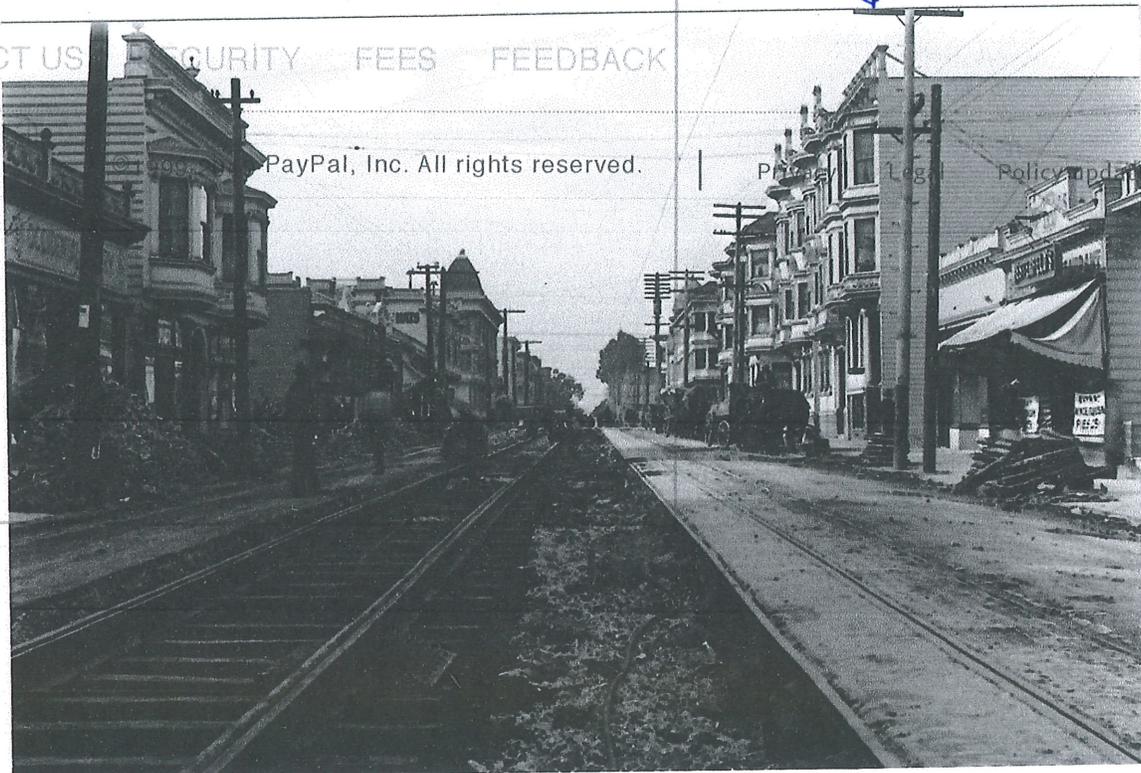
1552 Haight St

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HELP CONTACT US SECURITY FEES FEEDBACK



Original 1904 photo of the 1500 Block of Haight street. Distraction is located in the first three story building on the right. Originally built as 3 Flats but converted prior to 1910 to 2 flats over retail storefront.



1409

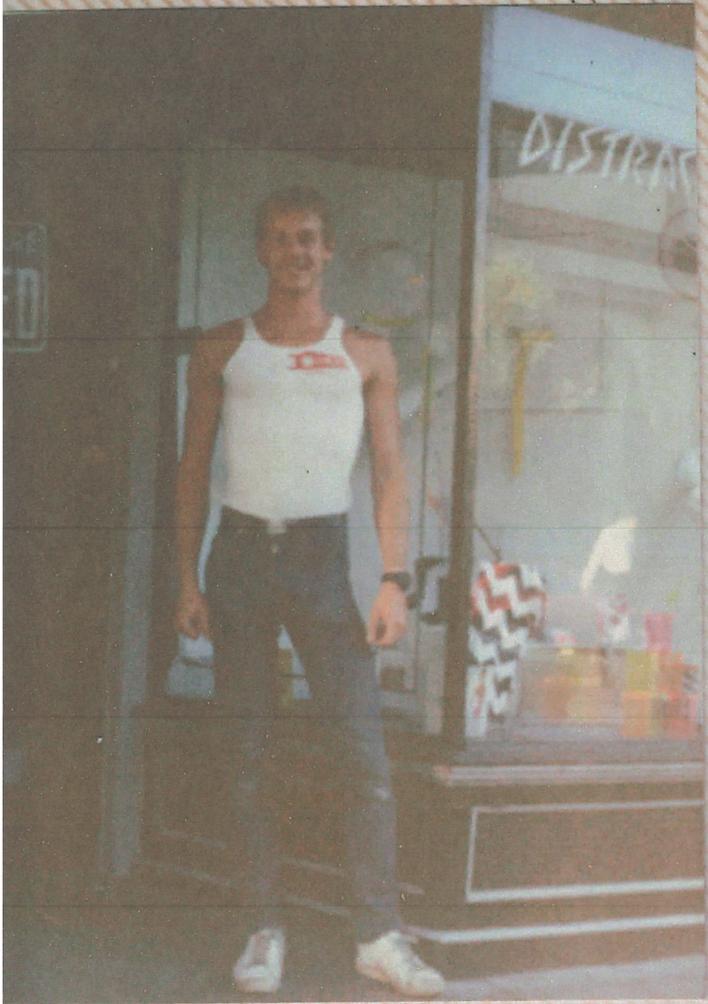
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Who Cares?

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Distractions circa 1982 when it was located at 1692 Haight

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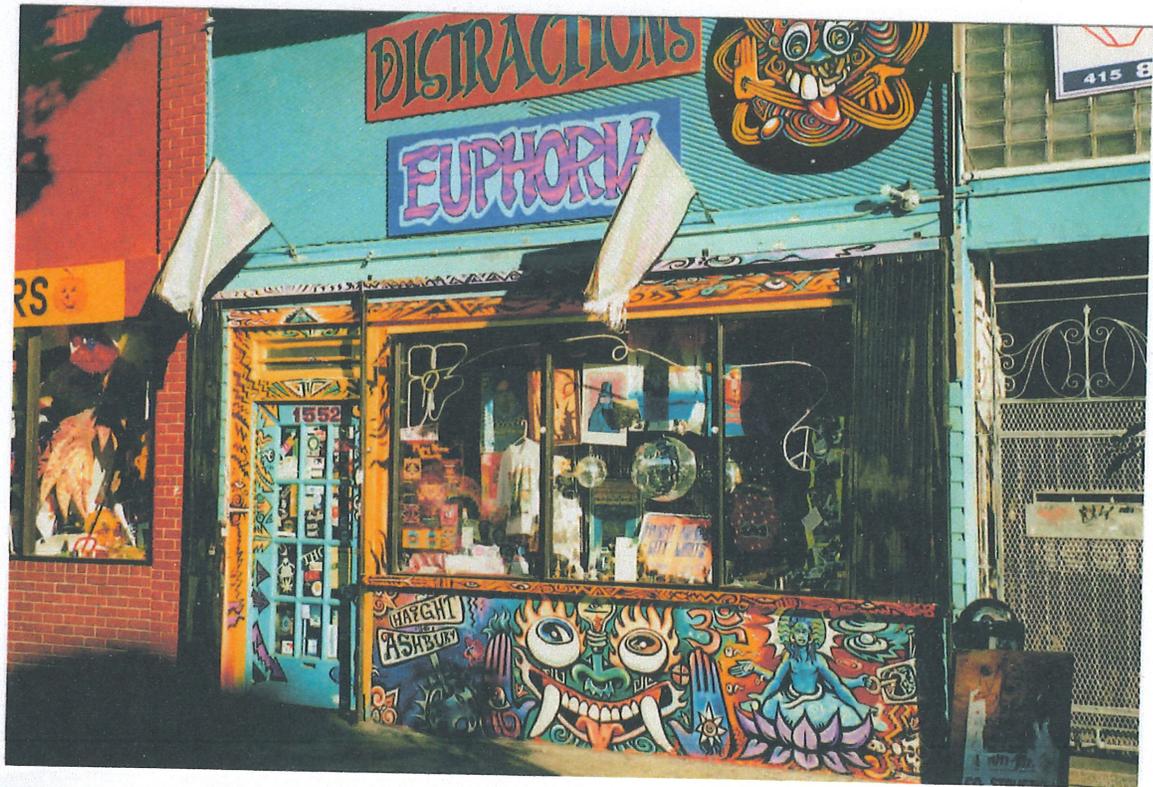
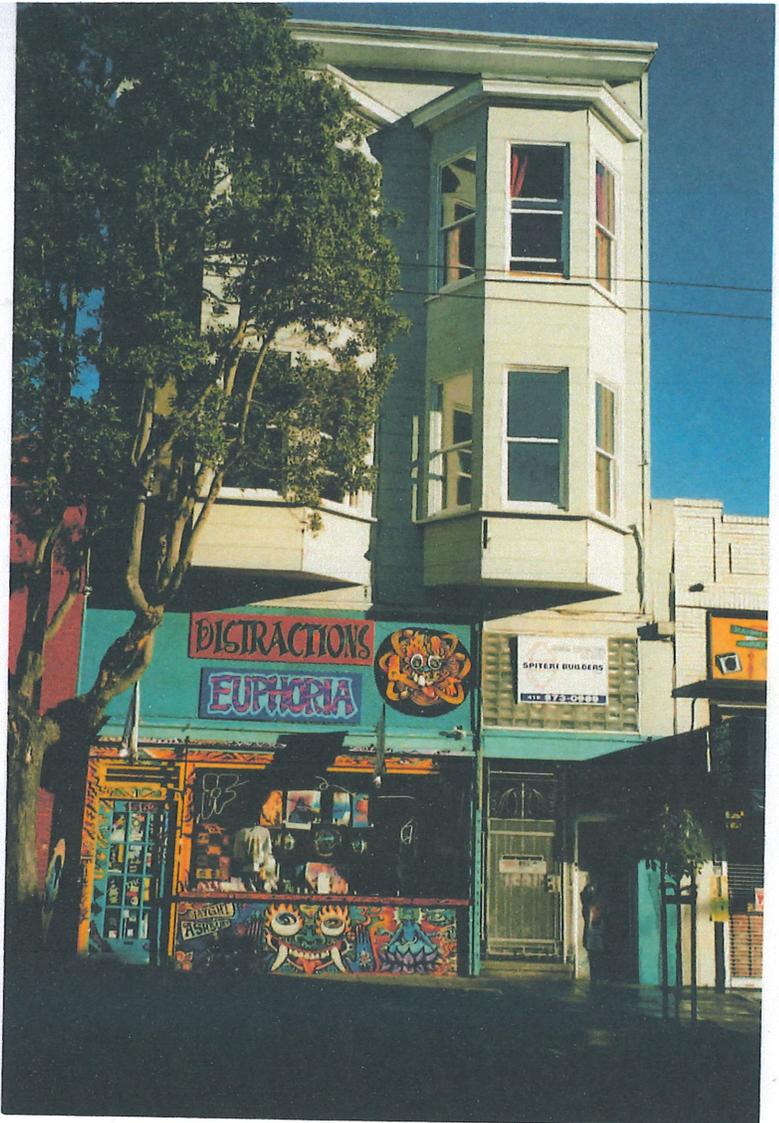
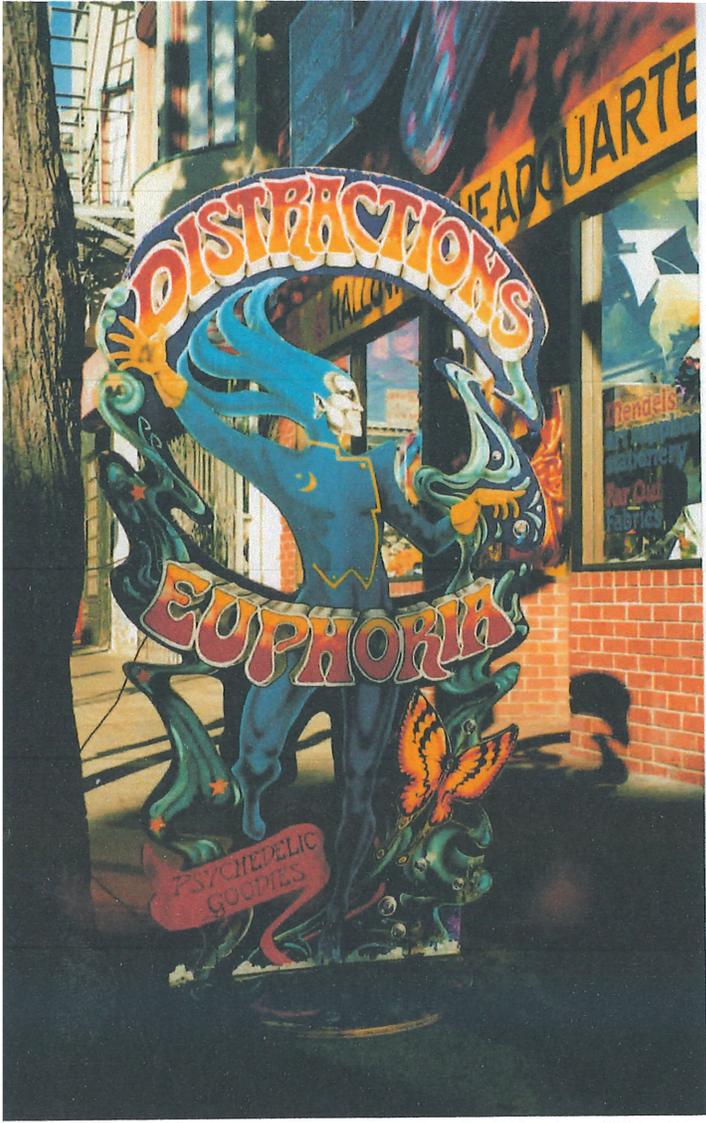


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Historical photos of Distractions Exterior and Signage
Circa 1994 located at 1552 Haight St

BURNING MAN 2009
tickets available here!

WRIGHT ASHBURY

Handwritten list of items for sale:
Handwritten
GLASS PAPER
HANDMADE
VAPORIZERS
JEWELRY
CLOTHING
MONEY TABLETS
CARDS
MONEY PINS
STAMPERS
Visual Delights







Comment signage at Distractions
1552 Haight St

1552

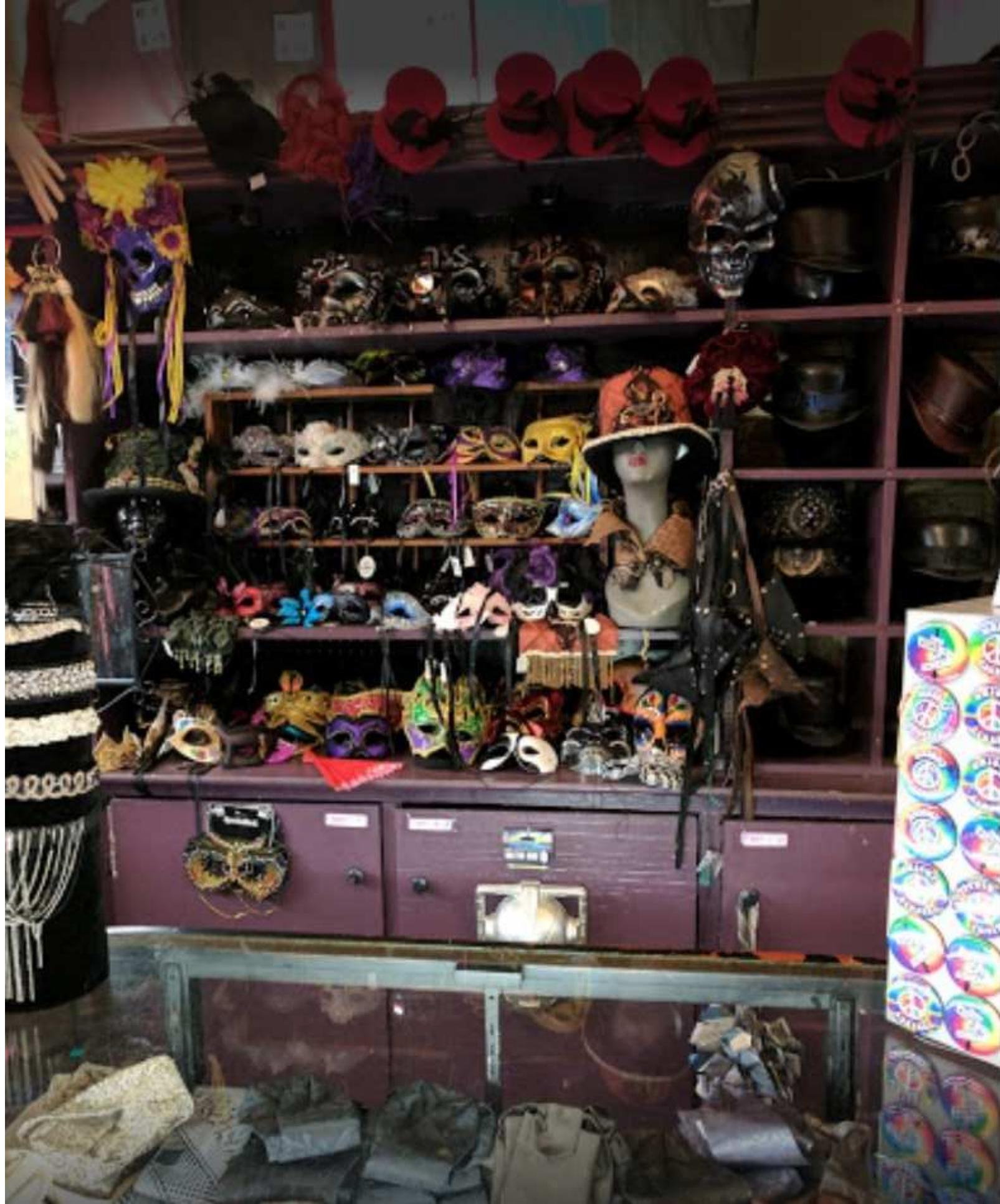














Custom jewelry on the top shelf made
by Marin county artist, Compass Rose

Leather hip belts made by Santa Cruz
artist Trevor Terin

Available at Distractions







Current photo of clothing available in the back room of Distractions



The Washington Post

The Rebirth of Haight-Ashbury

By Larry Kramer

January 13, 1979

The street sign on the corner of Haight and Ashbury streets here is perched atop its pole.

That may not seem like an important bit of news, but in the old days, that sign was stolen so often by souvenir-seekers that the city just stopped replacing it.

It has been good news, not bad news, that has helped Haight-Ashbury lose its standing as a tourist attraction. It is fast becoming just another (albeit fascinating) San Francisco neighborhood.

A renaissance of sorts has taken place in this former mecca of the dropped-out generation. People on the streets are no longer out-of-towners, but San Franciscans eating, drinking and shopping in what has become the newest chic neighborhood.

Gone are the droves of drug addicts, misfits and lost souls who wandered aimlessly along Haight Street, main street of a neighborhood immortalized by the music of the the mid-1960's, including that of San Francisco's Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead.

Instead, there are new groups of leather-jacketed, short-haired, bluejeaned men -- mostly gay -- walking the streets and wandering in and out of new, trendy shops. Typical of the changes is one long-time local stationary store, which changed its name to Reflections and covered its walls and windows with metallic, art-deco signs and displays.

Gays are moving into the Haight in record numbers, according to city officials, and turning around entire blocks within a few short months. The pattern is the same: They will buy up a series of well-worn Victorian houses, renovate them and clean up the neighborhood. The result: real estate values begin to soar.

For some people -- notably blacks and other minorities who are residents of the neighborhoods being renovated -- the trouble has just begun. The rapid increases in real estate values have resulted in soaring rents and taxes, and many elderly and poor people are being forced to leave their long-time homes.

According to city officials, many do sell their homes to speculators for some profit, only to see the buyers turn around six months later and sell the houses for considerably more money.

It has been a long, tough road for the Haight since the days of "flowers in your hair," and many of the locals are glad to see the iron gates come down from the fronts of grocery and liquor stores, even if it means higher rents.

Figures from the city planners' office reveal that the average sale price of a house in the Haight was \$46,207 in 1970, jumped to \$80,109 in 1975 (a 75 percent increase) and soared again to more than \$125,000 as of this week. It should be noted that single-family houses in San Francisco are the most expensive in the country.

There are other numbers from a recent professional marketing study that demonstrate the dramatic changes in the Haight. The percentage of people living in that neighborhood who earn more than \$15,000 went from 15 percent in 1970 to more than 25 percent last year.

Perhaps more important, though, has been the change of the age distribution of Haight residents. The percentage of people under 19 has dropped by 34 percent and 20-to-24-year-olds by 19 percent. At the same time, the population share of 25 -to-44-year-olds has increased by 46 percent.

And the commercial vacancy rate on Haight Street itself has dropped from 40 percent in 1970 to virtually nothing today. Of the merchants who moved their stores into the Haight during a recent five-year period, 47 percent said they did so because it was a "good area," "getting better," or "coming back," planners said.

Other statistics paint an even rosier picture for the future of the Haight. In 1970, only 14 percent of the homes there were occupied by their owners. Today, more than 55 percent are owner-occupied.

"I am pleased by the rejuvenation of Haight Street," says mayor Dianne Feinstein, "because it is enabling the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood to once again be a productive and livable community. The sight of new storefronts, increased pedestrian traffic and more attractive homes along Haight Street shows us that we can rescue neighborhoods from urban decay with intelligent planning and the commitment of local residents."

In fact, the rebirth of Haight has a great deal to do with progressive city planning. Audrey Owen of the city planning department has been that office's liason with the Haight-Ashbury community and is looking to buy a home in the area herself.

"There is a remarkable grass-roots cooperative effort going on here," Owen said. "For the first time in years the Haight-Ashbury Merchants Association and the traditionally more liberal Neighborhood Council are working together to plan for the future. They are working on a detailed Haight Street master plan that could be a landmark in neighborhood planning."

Owen said that a city study revealed that in one recent one-year period, 62 new businesses opened on Haight Street and gross receipts for local merchants soared by \$3.8 million during the same period.

In an effort to control this rapid commercial growth, the community has asked the city planning department to prohibit any commercial activity above the ground floor on Haight Street, and to ban the opening of any new bars, Owen said.

A recent city survey revealed that there were nearly three bars on every block of Haight Street and the city Board of Permit Appeals recently upheld a planning board veto on the opening of a new bar, paving the way for a likely street-long moratorium on bars.

"People want to make sure that there are adequate local services before we begin attracting people from other areas of the city," Owen said.

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BAY AREA REPORTER

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Cops Order Shop To Remove Display

Gay Men Touching Is 'Disgusting' Say Cops on Haight Street

by Ray O'Loughlin

On Friday, Mar. 8, San Francisco police officers from Park Station visited Jim Siegel at his shop, *Distractions*, on Haight Street. They demanded that he remove a window display they regarded as pornographic. That "pornography" consisted of pictures of men touching or embracing and an unclad male dummy partially concealed behind a television set.



Jim Siegel (Photo: Rink)

The display was to promote the Gay videos on sale in the store. Siegel promptly complied with a police officer's suggestion that certain items be removed.

"I think they were overstepping their bounds," said Siegel. "Cops must have better things to do than monitor window displays."

According to Jay Williams, who installed the display two days earlier, two squad cars and eight policeman had stopped at the store before Siegel had arrived. "They were heard to say things like how 'disgusting' and 'revolting' the display was," said Williams.

Later, one policeman returned to speak with Siegel. "He said they'd received a lot of complaints about the window," said Siegel. "The cop said he personally found some of it offensive and not proper for this neighborhood." Siegel said that the officer pointed out a few video display packages in the window that Siegel then removed. They depicted men in leather, Siegel said.

Siegel said there was no nudity or sex acts shown in the display. He said he was aware

(Continued on page 2)



So What's the Fuss? Here are the video covers police said were "disgusting" at Distractions on Haight Street. (Photo: Rink)

Cops Censor Gay Display

(Continued from page 1)

of city ordinances prohibiting such displays and sought not to offend anyone with his shop's windows. "I never allow any nudity or anything pornographic to go into the windows," he said. "It may be provocative but not pornographic."

According to Lt. Dennis Martell, of the San Francisco Police Vice Squad, city police code ordinances "prohibit the display of sexual anatomical areas and sex acts in shop windows to prevent school kids or people likely to be offended by it from seeing it."

He said that shop owners usually go along with requests from police who judge certain displays to be obscene. Refusal to do so could lead to issuance of a citation.

Martell said that the vice squad was not involved in this incident although he recalled "an inquiry from Park Station for guidance in this area that day or the day before."

But at Park Station, no one could recall the incident nor did a quick search of records for that Thursday and Friday reveal any complaints or assignment of officers on the case.

Capt. John Damon of Park Station said he was not aware of the matter at all until questioned by the *Bay Area Reporter*. "I've heard nothing about it," he said, "I'm not aware of any complaints having been received."

Window Dresser Jay Williams, who contracts with stores to produce window displays, said that this wasn't the first run-in with SFPD at

Distractions regarding one of his displays. He recalled a similar incident in January in which police objected to certain cards in the window.

At that time and last week, said Siegel, the police seemed to object mostly to the Gay theme of the display. "Anything where two men were touching seemed to be objectionable," said Siegel.

Siegel suspected that objections to his store, which sells punk-style clothing and jewelry as well as cards and some porn magazines, came from those trying to "gentrify" Haight Street. "Some people fear the store draws the wrong crowd," he said. He has operated Distractions for three years and has been in business on Haight Street for twelve years at other locations. ■

R. O'Loughlin

ALAMO SQUARE NEIGHBORS, JIM SIEGAL: by Winston Montgomery



Alamo Square Neighbors: Jim Siegel, the Wizard of the Westerfeld House

There are few houses in any San Francisco neighborhood that more splendidly celebrate Victorian architecture than Alamo Square's Westerfeld House at 1198 Fulton. Especially with its recent repainting, its design seems to embody the Victorian character, a bit stodgy, perhaps, a trifle reserved, but at its core as eccentric and whimsical as the ornamented tower that soars out of the structure towards the sky.

With its prominent corner location, the Westerfeld House helps anchor Alamo Square Park in its historical period, and like two old faithful companions, they sustain and complement each other. And as fortunate as the Alamo Square neighborhood is to have the Westerfeld House, we are also very fortunate in its owner, Jim Siegel, who is responsible for much of its renovation, and takes seriously his role as steward and champion of this San Francisco treasure.

Originally from Philadelphia, Jim Siegel left home at 16 bound for San Francisco seeking a freer, more creative and accepting environment, —the same dream that had brought so many young people to the Haight-Ashbury in the Sixties. But it was the Seventies, and a kind of nuclear winter had followed the Summer of Love. Many storefronts were boarded up, and there was an atmosphere of fear as street crime and harder drugs came to dominate the scene, prompting frequent police sweeps.

Young and on his own, Jim found things in San Francisco rough at first,

but luckily he soon came under the protective wing of the Haight-Asbury Switchboard, a volunteer service which acted as a community information and referral service, especially for the young people, many of them runaways, who had just arrived in town. The Switchboard maintained lists of housing, jobs and counseling services, and provided a place to leave and pick up messages.

In 1976, Jim Siegel and a partner took over the lease to a storefront that had previously housed one of the district's original psychedelic shops, The Phoenix. Trying to keep the tradition alive, Jim called his shop the White Rabbit. Today he is one of the longest term merchants on Haight Street, having had a retail business there for 24 years in 5 different locations.

Distractions, his present store, is located at 1552 Haight Street near Cole. It's the kind of establishment that in the past may have been termed a "head shop", but Jim prefers to call it an alternative youth store. It sells incense, tie dyed T-shirts, smoking utensils of all types as well as other accoutrements and memorabilia of alternative youth culture, past and present.

Most importantly, though, Distractions promotes and supports the latest, cutting edge "rave" electronic dance music, most of which is composed on or generated by computer. Also called techno or trance music, this is the rhythmic vehicle that drives the all night "rave" parties that currently dominate the underground scene in the Haight. Many of Jim's employees at Distractions are involved in the "rave" music scene as musicians and producers, and a favorite project of Jim's is the promotion of local "microbands" (so called because they are made up of one or a very small number of musicians) who record their music on their own computer. Jim prominently features their CDs for sale, as well as CDs from better known electronic musicians.

Jim Siegel has long been committed to Victorian architecture and historic preservation. He bought and renovated his first set of flats in lower Potrero hill in 1977, and over the years he has restored ten buildings, most of them long neglected Victorians.

He was also a leading voice in the successful attempt to save the Fallon Building. This uniquely shaped structure, located at 1800 Market near Octavia, was built by Carmel Fallon,

granddaughter of General Joaquin Ysidro Castro, for whom Castro Street is named. It was originally planned that a restored Fallon Building would become part of the new Gay and Lesbian Community Center, but projected repair costs escalated out of sight, and it was slated for demolition. At one point Jim offered to buy the Fallon Building himself, and pay the costs of fixing it up, but after a huge public outcry over the proposed tear down, a way was found to preserve and incorporate the building.

In a harmonic convergence of his two strongest passions, this past New Year's Eve Jim hosted a rave party at the Westerfeld House to raise money to save the Fallon Building. As 1,500 revelers danced the night away in the venerable old mansion, over \$7,000 was contributed.

Jim Siegel purchased the Westerfeld House (San Francisco Landmark # 135) in 1986. It is often mistakenly called the old Russian Embassy or Consulate, probably because it was once owned by a Russian community group which for a time operated a restaurant in its basement ballroom. The house had been on the market for a year, and one day when the previous owners were having a garage sale, Jim stopped and asked if he could look through the partially restored house. He fell in love with it, had to have it, and sold almost everything he had to get it.

Although the Westerfeld House has been significantly restored, much remains to be done. The foundation needs major seismic upgrading, and Jim thinks that would be a good time to restore the ballroom which has been converted to a rental apartment. The interior of the tower also needs work.

Jim Siegel loves Alamo Square and wouldn't live anywhere else. He is happy to see that over recent years the neighborhood seems to have changed for the better, and he is glad to see Divisadero Street finally coming alive. He thinks having a strong neighborhood association has been essential, and he is an active participant, making his house available for neighborhood fund-raisers and ASNA meetings.

So whether it be the Victorian age, or New Age, rave or restoration, Jim and his Westerfeld House are always open to new experiences, but they retain a deep and abiding respect for the achievements of the past.

Psychedelic trance state

How a gay kid made good, part two

by Mark Mardon

Jimmy Siegel has been making the scene since the days of Flower Power on Haight Street. He and his head shop Distractions have gone through the Summer of Love's hangover period through the coke and punk-rock eras to New Wave and beyond. Then along came rave culture.

What Siegel is real high on now is the psychedelic-trance dance scene. And as with most of his passions, he plans to capitalize on it — or lose his pants, but have fun in the process.

His obsession with the genre came about when “this cute little hippie boy comes into my store and goes, ‘Jimmy, you gotta come to this rave party with me.’”

Though he had more or less stopped going to raves — this was '94 or '95 — he told the kid all right, and went on to discover a whole new rave world populated by the same “world-traveler hippie kids who had been coming in and selling me clothing and things they'd brought back from India.”

At the parties, run by the CCC, an Oakland-based collective, the DJs and live electronic musicians played Goa trance, an Indian style originated by electronic musician Goa Gil, utilizing at least 144 beats per minute.

“At the time, I didn't quite understand the music,” says Siegel. “It was very fast, and I kind of thought it was speed-freak music.”

But it attracted cool kids, all dressed colorfully in fluorescent clothes and day-glo paint, who decorated the CCC warehouse space with spectacular psychedelic tapestries brought back from Bali or India, or made themselves.

“It was this total artists' collective of about 30 kids living there full-time, and about 100 travelers. That was the start in the Bay Area of the psychedelic-trance scene here.”

Siegel soon jumped in as a rave promoter, joining first with the CCC and later with an English partner to throw psychedelic-trance parties. The first big one, held at the Club Townsend space, lost \$5,000 “because our parties were so different than most raves back then. We'd start with a big meditation; everybody would be sitting around in a drumming circle, chanting, ‘Ohm.’ Most people thought we were a bunch of freaks, like a psychedelic hippie cult. Not many people showed up, and the ones that did wanted their money back because it was such a weird experience for them.”

Everybody worked for free, and any profits went to buying equipment or to benefiting charitable causes. Medical marijuana seemed an obvious cause for a party. Dennis Peron and Siegel's crew produced a huge New Year's party at Peron's Cannabis Buyers' Club, to which hundreds came to welcome 1998. The rave party took place on all five floors of the CBC's Market Street edifice, and was the talk of the underground town for months afterward.

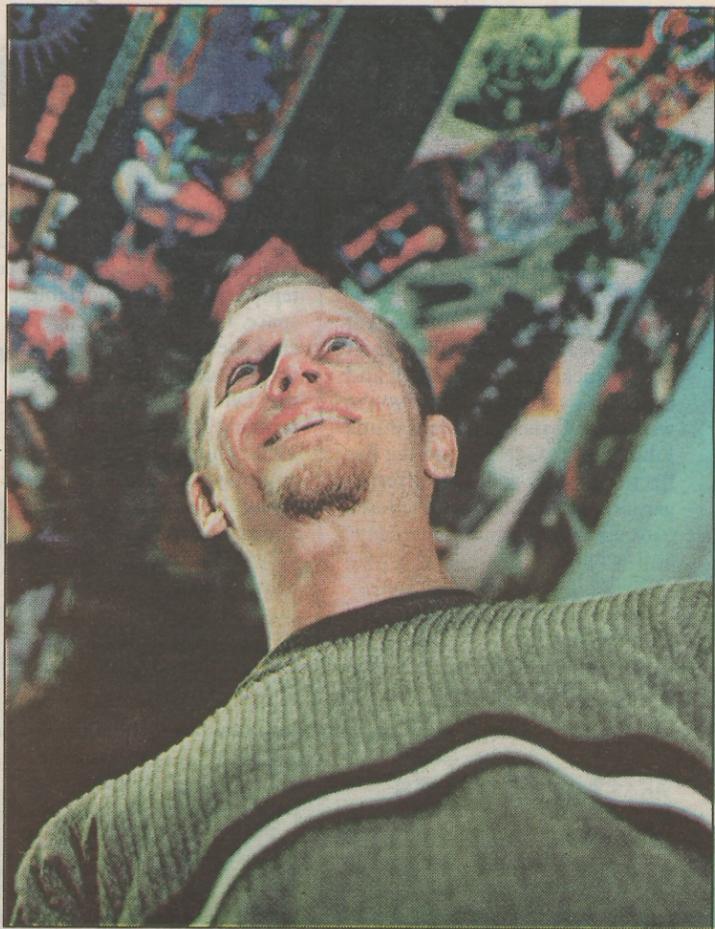
Eventually, Blue Room Americas came to town, affiliated with the London-based Blue Room psy-trance record label, and the parties became world-class events. A party held jointly in August 1998 by Blue Room Americas and the new San Francisco branch of the Japanese rave magazine *Zav-tone* drew thousands of ravers to the gigantic dance floors of Custer Avenue Stages in the city's industrial area. The event saw state-of-the-art sound systems and visual projections, world-renowned electronic bands and international DJs, an out-of-this-universe fashion/performance show, and a joyous crowd of fantastically garbed young ravers.

Psychedelic trance has since taken off, sweeping the Bay Area dance scene with a vengeance. Kids are creating at-home electronic music with computers and synthesizers. The list of weekly psy-trance parties keeps growing. When Siegel hosted his own New

Year's party last year at Custer Avenue Stages, thousands came, and the \$7,000 made was turned over to help restore the Fallon Building for the planned Gay Community Center.

Now Siegel is venturing beyond producing parties: he wants to produce a radio station as well. He and a crew of young entrepreneurs have launched Thump Radio, with the goal of establishing the first all-electronic-music radio station in the Bay Area. Already the team produces a weekly 2 p.m. Sunday broadcast on college station KUSF (90.3 FM), and electronic artists jump at the chance to record shows, in large part because of where they get to produce their sounds.

To record broadcasts on Thump Radio, DJs ascend five stories to the top of Siegel's Victorian mansion. As they stand at the turntables, they command a sweeping view of San Francisco,



Jane Philomen Cleland

page 47 ▶ Jimmy Siegel is high on Thump Radio's groovy electronica.

the old Russian Embassy.” Marconi, the inventor of the radio, did some of the first West Coast broadcasts from the mansion's

as the Fallon Building does now. But I see that with a little bit of love, you can turn an old eyesore into a diamond.” ▼

Jimmy Siegel

◀ *previous page*

from nearby Alamo Square to across the Bay. The house itself is beautiful, detailed with original Victorian furnishings and décor. There's a second-floor room with a 1960s-vintage collection of psychedelic posters and memorabilia — a true hippie pad. And the house boasts a rich history.

"It's a national trust property," explains Siegel, "a San Francisco landmark called the Westerfeld House, also erroneously known as the old Russian Embassy." Marconi, the inventor of the radio, did some of the first West Coast broadcasts from the mansion's

tower. Besides being a Russian social club at the turn of the century, it was also the first big hippie commune. You may have read about it in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*.

The mansion was inhabited at various times by jazz musicians, hippies, rock musicians, Manson Family members, Satanists — and now a rave king.

"I'm proud to be a part of it, restoring it," says Siegel. "That's why I'm so interested in restoring the Fallon Building. Both buildings were in a very bad state of disrepair. My house looked as bad as the Fallon Building does now. But I see that with a little bit of love, you can turn an old eyesore into a diamond." ▼

<https://hoodline.com/2016/05/from-street-kid-to-stalwart-jim-siegel-celebrates-40-years-of-business-on-haight>



From Street Kid to Stalwart: Jim Siegel Celebrates 40 Years of Business on Haight

Wed. May 4, 2016, 9:43am
by Camden Avery



Photos: Camden Avery/Hoodline

This Friday marks 40 years of business in the Upper Haight for [Distractions](#) owner Jim Siegel, and in that time, he's seen a lot. We sat down with him to talk about his unlikely transition from Haight street kid to veteran business owner, and how he's seen the neighborhood change over the decades.

Siegel says he's been in love with the Haight ever since he first saw it, as a teenager growing up in Daly City. In 1972, when he was 16 years old, he moved to the neighborhood.

"I was a street kid," he said. But unlike a lot of people arriving in the early 1970s, he said, "I was very blessed." He volunteered at the [Switchboard](#), a volunteer information center with a 24/7 phone line. New arrivals could call to get information on apartment rentals and jobs, advice on where to obtain free healthcare, survival guides for living for free in San Francisco, and tips on organized crash pads.

"There were about 500 people in the Haight keeping the spirit of the 1960s alive" at that time, Siegel said, all of them working to preserve the free culture of the Diggers. The idea was to "drop out and live on welfare, but give back to the community by volunteering."



Siegel at White Rabbit in 1976.

Siegel had taken a lot of acid by then, he said, and managed to qualify for mental disability income from the government. So in 1976, he and two friends, also street kids who were also living on [SSI](#) (then called ATD), applied to the government for additional rehabilitation grants; they were awarded \$5,000 each. They used the money to go into business as White Rabbit at 1409 Haight St., the space now occupied by [Black Scale](#).

White Rabbit had previously been Bob Stubbs's store, the Phoenix, which was founded in 1966. But by the time Siegel moved to the Haight, it was one of the last holdouts of hippie life from the 1960s. By 1976, most of Haight Street's commercial spaces were boarded up with plywood or operating as liquor stores, Siegel said, with the exceptions of Robert's Hardware, Mendel's, and a few others.

Stubbs, the Phoenix's owner, was retiring to Hawaii, so gave the store's merchandise to Siegel and his friends outright. The landlord was so happy to have the space occupied that he didn't charge the three friends any rent for the first year. (When they did start paying rent, it was \$250 per month.)

White Rabbit opened as a combined plant store, head shop, and pet supply store. "We didn't count on the money," Siegel said. "We did it to have fun." He said White Rabbit was largely a place to hang out; he and his friends invited people to come in and take LSD or smoke pot.



The head shop counter at today's Distractions.

The White Rabbit partnership dissolved in 1978, and Siegel moved over to 1372 Haight, where he founded Pipe Dreams (which still exists in a different incarnation) as a dedicated head shop. But that partnership had an even shorter life.

Soon after, Siegel sold out his share of Pipe Dreams, took a third of the merchandise up the street, and founded the first incarnation of Distractions, then at 1692 Haight St. (The space was most recently home to the Homeless Youth Alliance, until they [lost their lease in late 2013](#).)

Over the years, Siegel has operated shops at five different locations in the Haight. One relocation was forced by a 1989 fire at Haight and Cole; another time, he was evicted by a landlord for displaying gay magazines for sale in the window. But he's been settled in at 1552 Haight St. since 1989.



The store's format changed as frequently as its location. "We went from a hippie store, to a head shop, to a new-wave clothing store for [I-Beam](#) customers, to a Grateful Dead-type store, to a raver shop," Siegel said. "I'm gay, and I like young guys on Haight Street, so whenever I get a new boyfriend, I change the vibe. It's worked out pretty well!"

He said the store became Dead-themed right before the Dead's popularity re-exploded in the late 1980s. But once Jerry Garcia started using heroin, Siegel wanted to transition away from that

image. In 1992, he began shifting to a shop primarily for ravers. By the late 1990s, Distractions was San Francisco's exclusive outlet for Burning Man tickets, and Siegel was on the committee that convinced Burning Man to include more than just one "rave night," which at the time was held in a segregated camp.

"That's really shaped the direction the store has gone for the last 20 years," he said. "We cater to the counterculture, as the counterculture changes."

Siegel is thrilled to have made it to the 40-year mark, especially as a marker of how far he's come since his days living on the streets. "It's definitely a rags-to-riches story," he said, although "my whole idea was never to make money, [but] to keep the spirit of the '60s alive, because I love the neighborhood."

"The whole store falling into my lap when I was 19 was such a blessing. That's why I still support the street kids; I feel bad for the homeless kids today, because they don't have the opportunities that I did then. I'm glad to have been part of that community."

Certificate of Honor

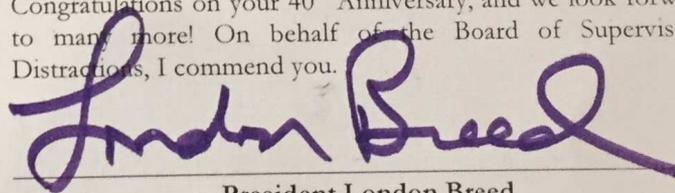
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS City and County of San Francisco

The Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco hereby issues, and authorizes the execution of, this Certificate of Honor in appreciative public recognition of distinction and merit for outstanding service to a significant portion of the people of the City and County of San Francisco by:

Distractions

40th Anniversary

On the occasion of its 40th Anniversary, the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco extends its highest commendation and appreciation to Distractions. Your eclectic mix of vintage and steampunk clothing has made your store an iconic part of the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. Congratulations on your 40th Anniversary, and we look forward to many more! On behalf of the Board of Supervisors, Distractions, I commend you.



President London Breed
San Francisco Board of Supervisors
Friday, May 6th, 2016



Filing Date: April 17, 2019
Case No.: 2019-006245LBR
Business Name: Distractions
Business Address: 1552 Haight Street
Zoning: Haight Street NCD (Neighborhood Commercial District) Zoning District
40-X Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 1231/014
Applicant: James Siegel, Owner
1552 Haight Street
San Francisco, CA 94117
Nominated By: Then-Supervisor London Breed, District 5
Staff Contact: Shelley Caltagirone - (415) 558-6625
shelley.caltagirone@sfgov.org
Reviewed By: Tim Frye – (415) 575-6822
tim.frye@sfgov.org

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Distractions is a retail store founded by James Siegel in June 1982 at 1692 Haight Street in a Victorian building owned by the Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic. The store was originally geared to the large gay market that was spilling over from the Castro at the time. The Haight was being renovated mainly by gay pioneers who were buying up the dilapidated Victorians and opening other gay shops and bars and night clubs such as the I Beam. Siegel decorated it in the “high tech” style of the day with blacks and gray. The store featured clothing and gifts and cards, with some smoking paraphernalia. Distractions also catered to local artists and was known for their monthly gallery openings focusing on young, local gay artists.

In 1989, a fire forced Siegel to move the shop to its current location at 1552 Haight Street. He used the opportunity to change the focus of the store a go back to his hippie roots to cater to the Grateful Dead crowd, selling tie dyes and Guatemalan imported clothing. In 1994, Siegel changed the store again to cater to youthful fans of Electronic Dance Music. He converted the back room into a record and CD store and started selling tickets to the various local raves. Around 2010, the store began to have more of a Victorian and Steampunk look that was popular at Burning Man and began offering locally crafted good that cater to the counter-culture and festival communities.

The business is located on the north side of Haight Street between Ashby and Clayton streets in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. It is within the Haight Street NCD (Neighborhood Commercial District) Zoning District and a 40-X Height and Bulk District.

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

- i. Distractions has operated continuously in San Francisco for 37 years.
- ii. Distractions has contributed to the history and identity of the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood and San Francisco.
- iii. Distractions is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the organization.

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

Yes. The business is associated with the counter culture history and traditions of the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. It is also associated with the Burning Man Festival.

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

Yes. The property is located within the California Register-eligible Haight-Ashbury Historic District.

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

No. However, the property has a Planning Department Historic Resource status of "A" (Historic Resource Present) because of its location within the eligible historic district.

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

No.

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

Yes. For over three decades, Distractions has enjoyed much media attention as an icon of the counter-culture community. Distractions has also been written about in many news stories, some included in the Legacy Business Registry application. The store is listed in the Haight-Ashbury Map & Guide published by Rufus Guides. Over the years it has been mentioned in travel books and airline magazines about San Francisco.

Jim Siegel was recently interviewed by CNN International for a special on the Haight and his historic home on Alamo Square, the William Westerfeld House, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is San Francisco Landmark Number 135. The CNN International show is called Quest for Adventure. In May 2016, then-Supervisor London Breed presented Jim Siegel with a Certificate of Honor to commemorate his 40th year in business as a continual Haight Street merchant.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business

Location(s) associated with the business:

- 1552 Haight Street

Recommended by Applicant

- Rotating murals by local artists
- Edwardian-era exterior building features
- Original hardwood floors, original doors, moldings, and Lincrusta wall finishes
- An inventory of clothing and goods associated with the artistic counter-culture, including high-quality Neo-Victorian and Steampunk wear
- Smoke shop

Additional Recommended by Staff

- None



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Historic Preservation Commission Draft Resolution No.

HEARING DATE: MAY 15, 2019

Case No.: 2019-006245LBR
Business Name: Distractions
Business Address: 1552 Haight Street
Zoning: Haight Street NCD (Neighborhood Commercial District) Zoning District
40-X Height and Bulk District
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ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR DISTRACTIONS CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 1552 HAIGHT STREET, (BLOCK/LOT 1231/014).

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 May 15, 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 Distractions 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 Distractions.

Location(s):

- *1552 Haight Street*

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- *Rotating murals by local artists*
- *Edwardian-era exterior building features*
- *Original hardwood floors, original doors, moldings, and Lincrusta wall finishes*
- *An inventory of clothing and goods associated with the artistic counter-culture, including high-quality Neo-Victorian and Steampunk wear*
- *Smoke shop*

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 2019-006245LBR to the Office of Small Business May 15, 2019.

Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ADOPTED: