



Get it while it's hot!



SIGN UP FOR THE WEEKLY FEAST NOW! >>

San Francisco magazine

OUR PUBLICATIONS



[.HTTP://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/SANFRANCISCOMAGAZINE](http://www.facebook.com/sanfranciscomagazine)



[.HTTP://TWITTER.COM/SANFRANMAG](http://twitter.com/sanfranmag)



[.HTTP://INSTAGRAM.COM/SFMAGAZINE](http://instagram.com/sfmagazine)

Last Street Standing

Lauren Smiley | Photo: Stephen McLaren | February 24, 2014

The scruffiest thoroughfare left in S.F. is transforming—one contested high-rise and storefront at a time. But the battle of Mission Street is far from over.

95 42
Share Tweet



(1 of 13)

1. "COMMUNITY" COMES FIRST

In late October, an email from a developer's public relations person popped into Paula Tejeda's in-box. The email was written in Spanish—an obvious ploy to curry Tejeda's favor. The writer claimed that she used to live in front of Tejeda's shop (another ploy, local cred being crucial to doing business in the Mission). She wanted to meet with Tejeda to discuss a 10-story, \$82 million, 351-unit luxury apartment building that her company was proposing for the corner of 16th and Mission, looming over the BART plaza.

Tejeda runs Chile Lindo, a cozy takeout empanada joint at 16th and Capp that attracts the full spectrum of the modern Mission, from working-class Latinos to street food-fetishizing hipsters. Why did Maximus Real Estate Partners—a name that conjures visions of a merciless legion of Roman centurions—come to kiss her ring? Tejeda is a feisty fifty-something Latina woman, born in New York with a megaphone in her fist, who has resided for the last 30 years in the Mission district. Her shop sits across the street from the proposed development, and she will receive notifications about its city hearings, which will provide her with a very public pulpit. If anyone threatens her survival in the neighborhood, she'll make sure that everybody—and she means everybody—hears about it.

In short, Tejeda represents something before which even almighty Maximus must bow: the Community.

When Tejeda agreed to meet with the emailer, two eager representatives showed up. They "alluded to the fact that we're in a position to get something from this," Tejeda recalls. "That this is the time that we, as a community, have negotiating power." The reps explained that in addition to the Walgreens and the Burger King, three small businesses on the plot—a greasy spoon Hunan restaurant, a Vietnamese market, and the Latino-frequented City Club bar—would be bulldozed, but would have first dibs on retail space on the tower's ground floor. Tejeda replied that she doubted her neighbors could survive a two-year hibernation. But while standing up for her fellow merchants, the street-smart entrepreneur couldn't help thinking about what was in it for her. The construction would inevitably drive away customers, and the more upscale corner could send her rent sky-high. But it could also be a golden opportunity. The developers were talking about bringing in local businesses. Could she cut a deal to lease some retail space and finally realize her original vision of Chile Lindo—a Dean & DeLuca-style market of high-end Chilean goods?

It would be a game changer for her. But it would also carry risks, not the least of which was the possibility of harming her image in the community, a word that she uses in every third sentence. "In this community you can be a prostitute," she says, "but you can't be a bourgeois capitalist, or they'll all turn against you."

Still, it's hard to imagine anyone steamrolling Tejeda. She once outflanked an ADA lawsuit filed against

MODERN LUXURY Interiors CALIFORNIA
Flip through the new issue

Facebook Most Read

Looking at Looking, Week Six (<http://bit.ly/NsLQoU>)

For a show dedicated to small moments, week six of HBO's Looking just brought the drama. Monday, Feb 24 at 5:01pm

One weather guru predicts that we might see a drought-bursting El Nino system form this summer. Let's hope he's right. Monday, Feb 24 at 4:02pm

State Senator Mark Leno and Assemblymember Tom Ammiano are the Batman and Robin of Ellis Act reform. But are they fighting the right super-Monday. Feb 24 at 2:43pm

Scene In...



[/san-francisco/scene/sf-magazines-cityguide-launch-party/img134223](http://san-francisco/scene/sf-magazines-cityguide-launch-party/img134223)

CityGuide Party at Reed & Greenough ([/san-francisco/scene/cityguide-party-reed-greenough](http://san-francisco/scene/cityguide-party-reed-greenough))

See All Photos >> ([/san-francisco/scene/cityguide-party-reed-greenough](http://san-francisco/scene/cityguide-party-reed-greenough))

ACCESS THE ULTIMATE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO SF ANYWHERE. SHOPPING | DINING | SIGHTSEEING | CULTURE | RECREATION | GETAWAYS READ THE DIGITAL EDITION NOW! >>

Now Playing

her shop by serving her empanadas out the door (her landlord settled). When an attorney attempted to evict her from the nearby Victorian flat where she has lived for 16 years, she refused to leave. And in December, she stood in a pickup truck blocking an Apple commuter bus at 24th and Valencia, railing to the crowd of activists and reporters: "So many people think that gentrification is good for business! It is not! Your community is the one that supports your business! It's now that we're in a position to make demands!"

In the great Mission gentrification chess game, the developers were moving their queen to 16th Street. And Tejada was sure not going to be a pawn.

2. THIS HAS ALL HAPPENED BEFORE

For decades, Mission Street has resisted gentrification. Even as parallel Valencia Street has become permanently yupified and high-end shops have crept onto staunchly Latino 24th Street, Mission Street has remained the city's largest and densest proletarian boulevard, a multicultural equivalent of Chinatown's Stockton Street. But now, the vital low-rent artery that pulses between 16th Street and Cesar Chavez has become the hottest—and most controversial—frontier of speculation in San Francisco.

A microcosm of the gentrification wars that are racking the city, the Mission Street battle pits developers against community activists and has a volatile ethnic and class dimension: rich white people coming in and displacing poor Latino ones. But in another sense, it's strictly a money hustle—and the people doing the hustling on Mission Street don't fall into neat ideological or ethnic categories. If the street does radically transform itself, it won't be the first time. It's hard to believe now, but after the 1906 fire destroyed the northern end of Mission Street, the rebuilt boulevard was San Francisco's most important and competitive retail strip outside of Union Square: a continuous corridor of storefronts like Woolworth's and J.J. Newberry, with furniture factories and showrooms (nine between 18th and 19th Streets alone) and movie houses bearing grandiose names like El Capitan as anchor tenants. When the street's prosperity was threatened by post-WWII suburbia, the Mission Merchants Association promoted the stretch between 16th Street and Cesar Chavez as the "Mission Miracle Mile." (The sign above That's It Market at 23rd and Mission still reads, "The Center of the Mile.")

By the '60s, though, the Mile was far from miraculous. A declining customer base and the rise of malls spelled the end for many of the largest tenants. The working-class whites who had dominated the neighborhood since the 19th century—Irish, Scandinavian, German, Scottish, and Eastern European—were fleeing to the suburbs, replaced by Latinos from Mexico and Central America. In 1950, the Mission district was only 11 percent Latino; by 1970, it was 45 percent Latino—and beset by the problems of other American inner cities: crime, blight, poverty, and a lack of social services.

In 1966, as part of the BART construction to excavate the stations at 16th and 24th Streets, the city planned to create a futuristic highrise village for middle-class commuters along Mission. To that end, it "upzoned" the street to 6 stories—and up to 10 stories at the 16th Street BART plaza. But a growing contingent of Latino activists, having witnessed how redevelopment had gutted the Fillmore, quashed the city's bid. Bankers and developers, already wary of the Mission—a 1960 community study spoke of its "lack of a wealthy residential class" and "no view that is going to raise the rent"—stayed away. Mission Street remained motley and down-market.

Despite the developer-enticing height zoning, most buildings on Mission still stand at one to three stories. In a city becoming more boutique by the day, it's here that you find U-Save Discount Furniture, a 99 Cent Bargain Store, and Thrift Town in the course of a single block. They're joined by Jim's \$10.25 country-fried steak, rhinestone-adorned tops at House of Jeans, photo studios with portraits of quinceañera sweeties, and Siegel's emporium of zoot suits. Asian fish markets, payday loan sharks, hair salons, and smoke shops line the street like a replicating DNA code. Down toward 16th Street, storefront churches are packed with evangelicals shaking tambourines, while a parade of SRO residents shamble outside. At this sketchy end of the Mile, there are frequent muggings and smash-and-grab robberies, along with occasional shootings.

[Page 2: "What does gentrification mean? It means it's getting better." \(http://www.modernluxury.com/san-francisco/story/last-street-standing?page=2\)](http://www.modernluxury.com/san-francisco/story/last-street-standing?page=2)



[/san-francisco/videos/best-of-the-bay-area-2012-party](http://san-francisco/videos/best-of-the-bay-area-2012-party)



[/san-francisco/digital-edition](http://san-francisco/digital-edition)

