



SIGNAGE of the *South Bay*

Alex Quintanilla



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of the

## *South Bay*

by Alex Quintanilla

THE  
**San Francisco**

*Cocktails*

**FEATURING**

**PATIO OPEN 3 TO 9**

**KARAOKE MON - TUES - WED**



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# INTRODUCTION

On a trip up north to the Bay Area in December 2017, I came across a retrospective on Walker Evans at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Up to that point, I had never even heard of him, but walking through the halls of that exhibition and examining his meticulous photographs of storefronts, signage, and advertisements, I felt a connection to these images.

Such banal objects, the stuff of the everyday, I would have never perceived would be the focus of such a critical exhibition, unless the images were stripped of their purpose to document, like Andy Warhol's colorful silkscreens. But Evans had captured these images on behalf of the government to report the effects of the Great Depression. It was for the masses to observe what had befallen their fellow countrymen. This was my introduction to "documentary photography" and the importance of capturing moments in time, no matter how ordinary they appear.

My introduction to becoming a documentary photographer was also influenced by journalism. I was once working on a magazine spread for my print design portfolio, and I was unsatisfied with photos of a beach that I had found online through Google Images. To get the photograph that I had wanted, I decided that I was better off taking it myself and bought my first camera, a Canon Rebel T6i, in 2015. Since 2019 I have upgraded to a Canon 6D Mark II.

To get better acclimated with using the camera, I took it everywhere I went, including that fateful trip to San Francisco. It became one of my most passionate hobbies, and I was determined to chronicle the world around me before it was lost to time, as Evans had done decades earlier. One particular part of my history was in danger of being erased, which led to the creation of this book.

I have lived in Carson for the past 30 years. An anomaly amongst a constantly migrating species. I have seen this city change and grow to the point where it is starting to become unrecognizable. Where dirt lots remained uninhabited for decades are becoming luxury apartments out of my price range. I feel like I am changing along with it. I am losing pieces of me here and there.

This quirky sign on the left has remained since my early days here, a constant fixture on the drive home from thousands of round trips over the years. A familiar friend that says, "I'm home." It's the little details that pique my interest in this remnant of the past. The sloping O. The faux brushstroke font that would feel right at home at a Chinese restaurant. The top of the sign reminiscent of a Japanese pagoda. The accumulation of rust that resembles scarring.

I had never considered how much Japanese influence there was in the signage and architecture. Still, it's easy to forget their presence when you remember that the South Bay was once home to the American headquarters of the big three Japanese automakers. Nissan and Toyota moved east, leaving Honda in Torrance.

But that charming sign is destined to disappear too, as it is scheduled to be razed over for more apartments. This development is a testament to the growing popularity of our city. Other aging structures will give way to modernity as the cities change, and my fear was that they would be lost to time if I didn't take action.

Over a few months in the first half of 2021, I set out and captured hundreds of images of signage, buildings, and other parts of the vernacular: the little, almost invisible things that you never seem to notice until they disappear, only to remain in memory.

The photographs in this collection are a sampling of the South Bay vernacular as it stands now. Like the portraits at SFMOMA, the subject matter may seem bland and uninteresting, but it demands a closer look and the details slowly reveal themselves.

One is the banner running across the roof of Secret Desires that exclaims, "We're open, we're essential!" amid a pandemic that will be foreign to future generations.

Another is the hodgepodge of businesses in the Town Centre, one of them advertising the mysterious "VAPE COMPUTERS."

Many of these details will be unfamiliar, lost to development, or disuse in the coming decades. I cannot prevent these changes, but I refused to remain helpless and did my part to memorialize these pieces of my history that are close to me.

It's my way of saving what can't be saved.



































































