



Design Guidelines for Old Alvarado

The City of Union City

UNION CITY

DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR OLD ALVARADO

Written and Illustrated by
Blair Prentice,
Harris & Associates

for the

Union City Planning Department



1. AN IDEAL ALVARADO STREETSCAPE

Many of the patterns and principles discussed in the design guidelines can be found encapsulated in this illustration. It is not just application of individual design rules that matters, it is the achievement of an ultimately harmonic whole through their wise application. Note that the overall scale relationships work very well although some buildings are two story while others

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
DESIGN HISTORY	3
GOALS	7
<u>THE GUIDELINES</u>	
The Alvarado Commercial District	11
Parking and Pedestrian Circulation	13
Existing Buildings	13
New Buildings	15
Site Planning	17
The Storefront	19
Two Story Scale	19
Covered Walkways	20
Parapets and Cornices	24
Siding	25
Windows	28
Doors	30
Signs	31
Historical Building Components	33
Paint	34
The Backs of Buildings	35
Landscaping	36
Lighting	38
Trash Enclosures	41
Mechanical and Electrical Equipment	43



are single story. Parapets on the smaller buildings and the more-or-less continuous line of overhangs help to accomplish this. Dedicated pedestrian and auto access corridors to the parking behind are also windows to nicely landscaped rear walkways.



2. Alvarado picnickers passing through Centerville. The meat market at left is a prototypical wood storefront, while the two story facade at right reveals the influence of the classical revival which followed the Victorian period.

Introduction

Alvarado's heyday is long past and a casual passerby might not take a second glance at its surviving assortment of commercial real estate. Yet for all that, there is more than meets the eye in this district. It remains Union City's best opportunity to create an inviting urban, pedestrian-oriented commercial area, one with deep roots in local tradition. The City has long recognized, and through its support of such efforts as the Old Alvarado Plan, sought to achieve this potential.

Old Alvarado is a district whose time has come. To be sure, there are missing pieces in Alvarado's design fabric but the momentum is building for change. One significant commercial project, in construction, is destined to fill a key vacant parcel. Another major property owner is beginning to work with the City on facade and interior

improvements. Large-scale housing developments continue to be built in the immediate vicinity, providing additional market support.

The time for concerted City action is now and the challenge is to both attract and carefully guide new development to achieve a vital commercial center that is also respectful of Old Alvarado's past. Union City already has a City Council and staff committed to controlled growth and design quality. Reflecting this commitment, in 1980 the City commissioned a major study which led to adoption of the Old Alvarado Re-development and Revitalization Plan. These design guidelines, the embodiment of the "Old California theme" alluded to in the Old Alvarado plan, provide another basic tool to shape further development in Alvarado and to realize the maximum potential in each existing building and site. A history of the district is provided so that the reader can appreciate what has gone before and better imagine what the future can bring.

Design History

A PICTURE OF OLD ALVARADO

Long before freeways split the City, before even paved roads, when Mission Blvd. was not much more than a dusty trail, Alvarado was a thriving town sending the grain and produce of Mission San Jose and the surrounding farmlands to San Francisco on boats that plied the sloughs of Southern San Francisco Bay. Alvarado founder John Horner purchased the first steamer seen in the area - the Union - the namesake of this City. (Union City and New Haven were adjacent rival towns that merged and assumed the new name 'Alvarado').

When present day Union City was incorporated, it combined the towns of Alvarado and Decoto and the farmland between them).¹

Alvarado was a frontier town - a rustic place with much the same appearance exhibited by other anglo settlements throughout the West. The buildings were wooden, the architecture reflecting the nationwide trends towards Greek Revival and the various Victorian styles. However, the expression of these styles was limited for the most part to simple vernacular renditions, lacking the elaborate ornament, scrollwork and turnings which sometimes come to mind at the mention of the word "Victorian".

The Victorian Period - Late 1800's.

It was an era of pattern books - volumes filled with ready-made plans and details for all kinds of buildings and any budget. Ornament was ordered long distance from catalogues of millwork. Simpler commercial buildings, the kind that predominated in Alvarado's early days, might sport a bracketed cornice or simple window hoods but seldom much more. The main nod towards pretension were false fronts - tall parapets that concealed the functional but unimposing gable roofs behind.



3. The Robert & Harvey Cash Store in the 1890's.

The architecture of Alvarado, like other towns of the period became much more than just the sum of its parts. The buildings had a pleasing human-scale and there was consistency in scale as well - the one story buildings being comfortable in relation to the two story ones by virtue of their false fronts.

1. For an informative illustrated general history of Union City, see "Looking Back: Early Glimpses of Union City", Nancy A. Nickel, Ed., published by the City of Union City.

