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Client: San Remo Hotel in SF

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RESTORING THE SAN REMO HOTEL – A Field Family Contribution

When Tom and Robert Field acquired the San Remo Hotel 35 years ago, their new venture reflected an entrepreneurial environment that flourished in San Francisco during most of the 20th Century. The city traditionally welcomed enterprising family businesses, rewarding them for contributing to the local economy with loyal patronage, neighborhood support and civic recognition.

The Field brothers followed the lead of their parents. Their father, realtor George Field, and their late mother, local Jewish community leader Julia Field, adopted the city as a permanent home. Natives of Hungary and holocaust survivors, they embraced the American dream and all that it promised. In rebuilding their lives and raising a family in San Francisco, they set standards for working diligently, recognizing opportunities and preserving a sense of history.

George and Julia Field immigrated to the United States in 1949, settling first in New York and relocating in 1952 to Sonoma County, where they operated a small poultry farm. A few years later they moved to the city, having purchased Label's, a popular delicatessen in San Francisco's multi-cultural Richmond District. After performing daily farm chores at an early age in rural Northern California, Tom and Robert found themselves absorbing the basics of retail food service and business management in a bustling urban neighborhood.

George pursued real estate courses at night, obtained a broker's license and formed T&R Investments. George and Julia sold Label's in 1961, and the family concentrated on what would eventually become investments in more than 30 local properties. By the time they graduated from San Francisco State University, the brothers had learned how to assess, acquire, renovate and maintain older buildings – valuable skills in a town that assigns a high priority to architectural heritage.

Julia passed away in 1997 and George retired a few years ago, but Tom and Robert have continued the family business and the vision that shaped it. The brothers renovated several vintage properties in the city before focusing on the San Remo as a promising centerpiece for their family's accomplishments.

Standing outside the hotel's Mason Street entrance in 1970, they were impressed with the potential location value. Fisherman's Wharf beckoned to the north, only two intersections away. A half-mile south at Washington Square, the lofty twin spires of Saints Peter and Paul Church, visible above rooftops, marked the heart of North Beach. East of the hotel, the mix of apartment buildings, cafes and shops constituted an inviting residential-commercial neighborhood. One block west, the Powell/Mason Street cable car line — a direct route to and from Union Square — ended near the site of a factory operated in the 1870s by cable car inventor Andrew Hallidie.

The 62-room hotel had a colorful history of its own, dating back to its construction after the great earthquake and fire in 1906 by Bank of America founder A.P. Giannini. Built on Mason at the edge of Water Street, near the city's original shoreline before landfill, the three-story Italianate Victorian provided convenient lodging for merchant seaman, waterfront workers and a transient labor force recruited to rebuild the city.

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In decades that followed, the occupant list expanded to include artists, poets, journalists and an increasing number of tourists and business travelers in search of budget-priced rooms. The street-level bar and informal family-style Italian restaurant became a favorite meeting place for community leaders, sports stars, local neighbors and hotel guests. Alcoholic beverages were served in coffee cups and saucers during Prohibition. Full course dinners were served for fifty cents in the Depression days

Unfortunately, the property had seriously deteriorated by the 1960s, but the Fields accepted their most formidable restoration challenge with hands-on enthusiasm. In addition to a purchase price of more than \$1 million, they invested more than \$500,000 in improvements. Virtually everything required an upgrade: ceilings, walls, floors, stairways, windows, plumbing and fixtures, restaurant appliances, bar area, bathrooms.

Consistent with its history, the brothers elected to maintain the San Remo as a fully licensed tourist hotel that also welcomed long-term guests in search of low-cost accommodations. Today, the hotel continues to house seven residents who pay rents of \$114 to \$180 per month or weekly rents of \$39 to \$115.

Although tourist rates for most of the rooms range from a modest \$60 to \$85 a day, the city receives consistent financial benefits from efficient management and marketing of the San Remo. Annual wages, insurance and taxes for 16 to 18 workers – desk clerks, housekeepers, maintenance workers and managers – are estimated at nearly \$350,000.

In recent decades, the hotel tax based on tourist occupancy at the San Remo has averaged approximately \$118,000 per year, bolstering the city's general fund for social, cultural and civic programs. The brothers estimate that during the last 15 years, the hotel has generated between \$1.3 million and \$2 million in tourist taxes.

Assuming a year with at least average occupancy, San Remo guests contribute about \$1.5 million annually to the local economy through shopping, transportation, meals, recreation and entertainment.

Top domestic and international tour guides, including Frommer's, Fodor's, Berlitz and Lonely Planet, have recommended the hotel, noting its authentic restoration and reasonable daily rates. Frommer's listed the San Remo as a "Super-Special Value" in its 1997 premiere edition of "Frugal Traveler's Guide – California from \$60 a Day," and the editors selected a photo of the hotel for the cover.

Considered an ideal setting by location scouts, the hotel has appeared in numerous motion pictures, television series and commercials.

To this day, the brothers study archive photos and canvas antique shops in search of finishing details that mirror turn-of-the-century West Coast conditions. A tour of the hallways, filled with framed documents that chronicle the hotel's place in San Francisco history, transports guests through a century of evolution and tradition. Brass bed frames and antique nightstands are added to rooms as furniture needs to be replaced – part of preserving an ambience appreciated by visitors from around the world.

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