In the last several years numerous trial balloons for new development or for redevelopment in the Mission District have gone up. These have included proposals for rezoning the northeast Mission industrial zone, formation of a new area plan for the entire district, and staking out a Redevelopment survey area that could encompass the district bounded by Dolores, 14th Street, Potrero Avenue and Army (Cesar Chavez) Street. The mayor's office floated the idea of a Bioscience Special-Use District for the northeast Mission.

At the moment, none of these has gone anywhere, in part because no clear consensus has formed among the residents and businesses in this diverse and vital district. Yet the focus of attention on the Mission remains, and it is clear the district is primed for growth and development, whether that results from the workings of the marketplace, which has already brought a lot of change, or planned development through a government agency. In either case, it is time for preservationists to start to worry.

In 1968, Here Today stated, "The Mission is the most self-contained of San Francisco's districts. . . ." It had its own industrial base, interlaced with working class housing, a "downtown" retail-commercial-entertainment zone, and fine middle class residential neighborhoods.

Today, for the most part, the Mission retains these characteristics, although smaller businesses and live/work uses have taken the place of heavy industry in the northeast Mission, through adaptive reuse of old buildings, and Mission Street's "Miracle Mile" of retailers that once included branches of downtown stores like Sherman Clay and Hale Brothers, now offers shopping for the district's culturally varied population.

The purpose of this photo essay is to increase awareness of the Mission's rich architectural legacy, both in the public at large and among planners and developers whose decision-making will affect the district for many years to come. At present, there are 17 individually designated City Landmarks in the Mission and one historic district, Liberty Hill. Nearly all of the buildings featured here do not fall into either category. Some of them are landmark-quality, while others are good contextual buildings that illustrate the district's historic patterns of development.

It is not possible, in so limited a scope as this, to encompass the full richness of the Mission's built environment, but what appears on these pages may be sufficient to convince people to take steps to conserve that heritage. The first step should be a formal architectural survey of the district to document its cultural resources fully.
Top, #2 (719-723 York) & #8 (701 & 703-5 Florida) are examples of 19th century working class housing in the northeast Mission industrial zone. #3 Vegetable gardens preceded this row of flats on Ramona Street built in the early teens. #4 1100 block of Shotwell: a building of flats separates two older residences. Contractor Robert Trott built the gabled Tudor Revival house for himself about the turn of the century; 2-story Italianate residence, now 2 flats, dates from c. 1875. #5 A row of 6 Queen Anne houses from 1890 (1126-52 Guerrero) most of them converted to multiple-unit residences. #6 1110-1116 South Van Ness, block of Stick Style flats that T.J. Welch designed for Baroness von Schroeder (1889). #7 430-32 & 424-26 Fair Oaks, Craftsman designs from 1910/11. 

Churches are a good indicator of neighborhood changes. Left, #14 Mission Revival church at 17th & De Haro began as the Swedish Baptist Church early in the century, housed the Church of Christ after 1906, now home to Cornerstone Family Fellowship. #15 Falch & Knoll designed the Emanuel Church of the Evangelical Association (1915) at 19th & Capp. In the late 1950s it became the Russian Convent of Our Lady of Vladimir. #16 Notre Dame School (a City Landmark) at 347 Dolores, rebuilt on old foundations after destruction in 1906, will become a residence for the elderly (photo by David Bricker). #20 1894 Queen Anne at Fair Oaks & 25th. #21 Old signs of the Mission Street retail district. #22 Colorful contemporary murals line many of the alleys and secondary streets of the Mission.

Row above, #15 Mergers and consolidations have left some fine old branch banks vacant and awaiting a new use. This former Hibernia Bank (1924) is at 22nd & Valencia. #16 Market hall at 22nd & Mission, built after 1906. #4 Ward & Bloom designed this brown shingle structure for the Girls Recreation Club (1911), now Mission Neighborhood Center. #5 This imposing 1876 house was moved from Haight Street to 15th, after 1906. The northeast Mission industrial zone is in transition. Right, #23 The Best Foods Plant (Bryant & Mariposa Streets), several buildings constructed over a period of 25 years beginning in 1923, carries a “For Sale” sign and awaits a new use, while others have undergone varied transformations. #24, an old wine warehouse at 18th & York, houses retail uses. #26, See's Candy Factory (1921), across the street, now York Street Studios. #23 Project Arau, the old American Can complex (1923), was one of the city's first live/work conversions. #14 Former Langendorf Bakery on Shotwell.
Looking north on Mission Street from 22nd Street during the 1930s. At one time, as many as five motion picture theaters lined the street between 18th and 23rd, making the district a major entertainment, as well as retail and commercial center.

Residential uses mingle with retail and light industrial in much of the Mission District's flatland, as in this view south on Capp Street looking toward 17th. This mixture is one of the things that makes the area so visually exciting.

The Architect and Engineer (May 1910) published this design by Crim & Scott for the New Mission Savings Bank building at 16th and Valencia. Its distinctive overhanging parapets were removed sometime before 1952 (inset).

Continuing the Mission District's tradition of nurturing social services, the recently renovated landmark 1850s Tanforan Cottage at 220 Dolores (above) is now a residence for persons with AIDS, while Project Open Hand makes new use of a 1938 warehouse at 2720 17th Street (below).