

TUCSON
THE NEON PUEBLO
ARIZONA

A Guide to Tucson's Midcentury Vintage Advertising featuring the photography of *fotovitamina*

TUCSON HISTORIC PRESERVATION FOUNDATION



The Neon Pueblo

TUCSON'S MID-CENTURY VINTAGE ADVERTISING

The Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation (THPF) has worked to document, study and preserve Tucson's unique, eclectic mid-twentieth century neon signs. As part of this initiative, THPF has restored a collection of these classic signs, salvaged over the last decade by individuals who foresaw their historic value. The signs have been reinstalled in partnership with Pima Community College along West Drachman Street between Oracle Road and Stone Avenue, once part of the historic alignment of US Routes 80 and 89 and Arizona Route 84, which ran through the middle of Tucson.

In 2010, THPF was awarded a grant from the Arizona Humanities Council to develop this guide to illuminate our favorites of this flickering and humming resource.

For decades, the City of Tucson Sign Code outlawed these neon creations. Many colorful dynamic nocturnal landmarks disappeared from our arterial streets and historic highways, and continue to vanish at an alarming rate. In a multiyear initiative, the Tucson-Pima County Historical Commission, the City of Tucson Historic Preservation Office, the Citizen Sign Code Committee, and the Sign Code Division worked together to draft sign code revisions that encourage the retention and preservation of these unique assets.

The Tucson City Council unanimously voted to amend the code in June, 2011. It is now possible for vintage signs to be reborn, restored, and re-erected to delight visitors and locals, and keep alive a part of Tucson's colorful history.

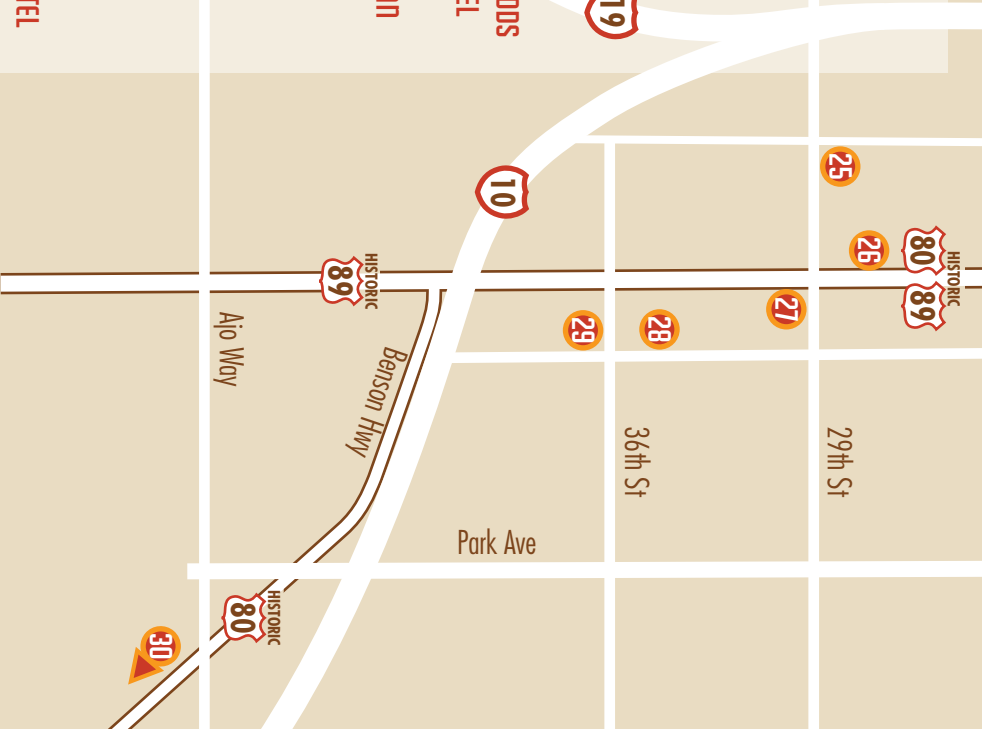
ABOUT THE HISTORIC LANDMARK SIGN PRESERVATION PROGRAM

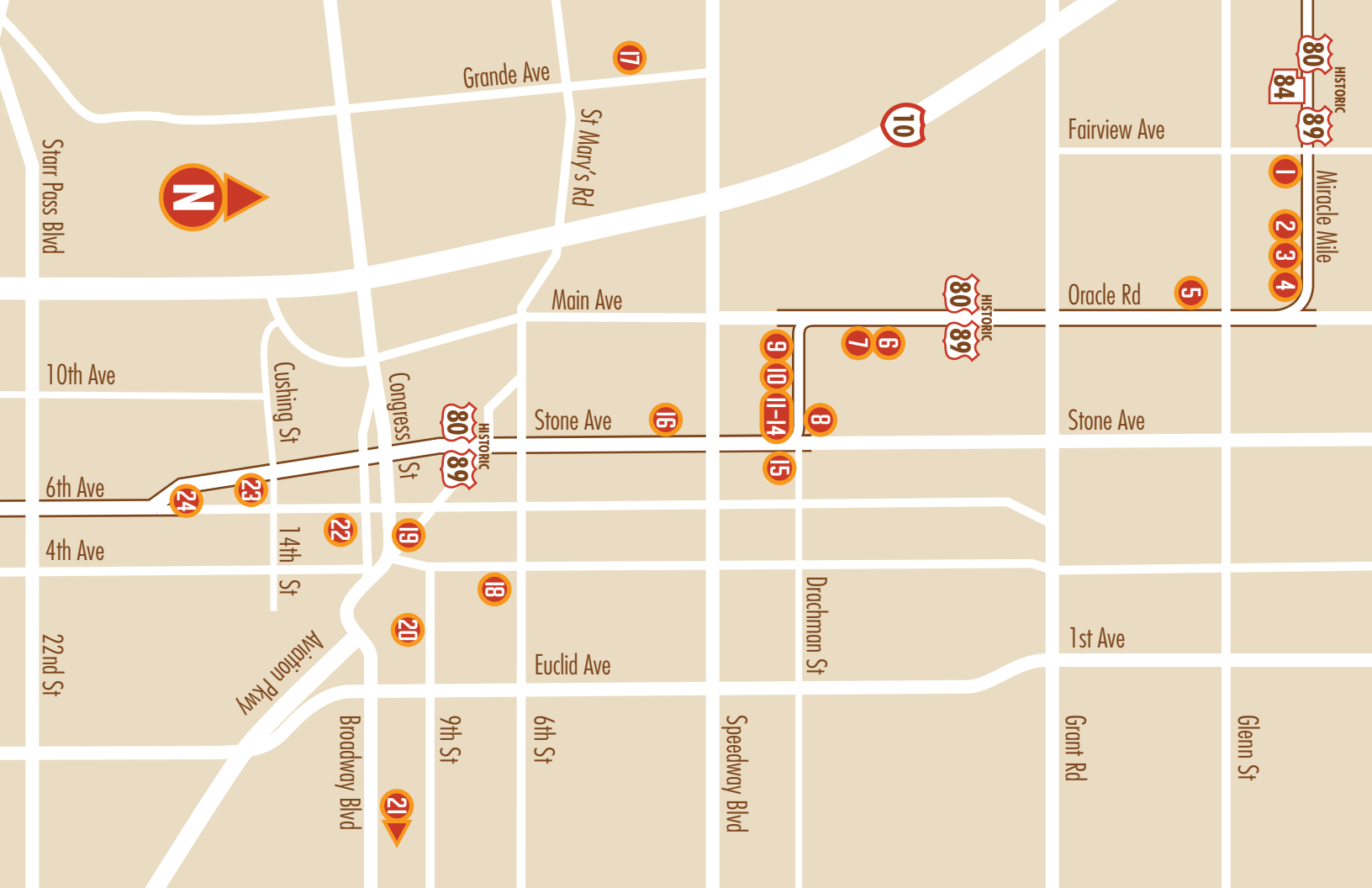
In 2011, the City of Tucson's Historic Landmark Signs Preservation Program was created to encourage voluntary preservation of historically significant older signs, which are often larger than what is allowed by Tucson's Sign Code. Signs that meet the criteria may be designated as Historic Landmark Signs, allowing them to be repaired, restored, adaptively reused, and even relocated. Designated signs may be exempted from a business's sign allowance.

Learn more online at tucsonaz.gov/preservation or by calling 520-837-6965.



1. GHOST RANCH LODGE
2. RIVIERA MOTOR LODGE
3. SUNLAND MOTEL
4. MONTEREY COURT
5. TIKI MOTEL
6. OURIL INN
7. LA SIESTA MOTEL
8. SPARKLE CLEANERS
9. FRONTIER MOTEL
10. TUCSON INN
11. MEDINA'S SPORTING GOODS
12. TROPICANA MOTOR HOTEL
13. MAGIC CARPET GOLF
14. CANYON STATE/ARIZONAN
15. FLAMINGO HOTEL
16. SAHARA MOTOR INN
17. PAT'S CHILL DOGS
18. CARUSO'S
19. HOTEL CONGRESS
20. EMPIRE & THE BUFFET
21. LUCKY WISHBONE
22. PUEBLO HOTEL
23. DOWNTOWN MOTOR HOTEL
24. ALAMO APARTMENTS
25. VALENCIA MARKET
26. T&T MARKET
27. ARIZONA MOTEL
28. SUE'S FISH
29. CROSS ROADS DRIVE INN
30. WESTERN MOTEL





Miracle Mile



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733 S. STONE AVE.

Alamo Apartments

The Alamo Apartments are located at the “Five Points” intersection, the southern gateway to downtown on the historic alignment of US Routes 80 and 89. Frank and Elizabeth LaMar built “The Alamo” in 1937 with the vertical projecting sign designed by Isadore Posner, one of Tucson’s neon artists who was active from 1934 onwards. Isadore was the son of Philip Posner, who established Tucson’s first sign painting enterprise in 1913.

The sign includes flat block, single- and double-tube letters and a neon “office” arrow pointing to the Stone Avenue entrance. The sign was restored in 2008 by Addisigns when the Primavera Foundation restored the building.

28

1746 S. 6TH AVE.

Arizona Motel

On the historic alignment of US Routes 80 and 89, the Arizona Motel was opened in 1930 by the Yunt family. Along with a trailer court, the large sign was added in 1939. The sign originally read "Arizona Tourist Court" but was reconfigured over time. The southwestern Art Deco flavor remains emblematic of historic South 6th Avenue and the transcontinental highway.

The sign features double-tube red neon over white painted flat block letters and a white single tube outline with a sunburst on top. The background is palo verde green.



Canyon State Motor Lodge / Arizonan Motel



The large pole-mounted sign in the shape of Arizona was originally located at 437 Casa Grande Highway, AZ Route 84 (today's "Miracle Mile"). The sign was constructed in 1951 for the Canyon State Motor Lodge. The motel was renamed the Arizonan Motel in the 1970s.

The sign includes a single-tube outline, single-tube flat cursive and block lettering. The sign was torn down in 2010 but saved by the Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation. It was restored in 2011 by Cook and Co. Signmakers and installed on the downtown campus of Pima Community College featuring both the 1951 and 1970s design configurations. The original side of the Entrance arrow advertises "Panel Ray Heat," evidence of an earlier time when heating and cooling were not taken for granted.

19

434 N. 4TH AVE.

Caruso's

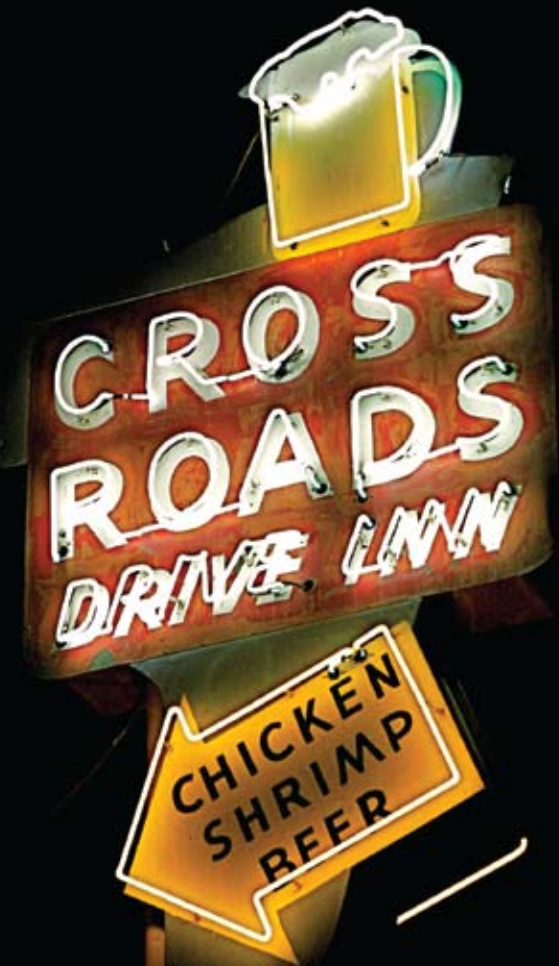
Caruso's, Arizona's oldest Italian restaurant, opened at its current location in 1939.

The pole-mounted, painted steel sign with flat, single-tube cursive, block and italic letters dates to the mid-twentieth century. Art deco features include a stylized chef sporting a classic toque, black handlebar mustache, and white apron delineated in neon. The portly chef holds a plate of neon spaghetti whose flashing sequence creates fork and pasta movement.



30

2602 S. 4TH AVE.



Cross Roads Drive Inn

The 1951 irregular shaped pole-mounted Cross Roads sign has single-tube neon. The sign includes three distinct elements: the "Cross Roads" name on a red square background, the yellow arrow listing restaurant specialties: "Chicken, Shrimp, Beer," and a foaming beer mug topping the sign. This restaurant continues in operation, albeit without drive-in service.

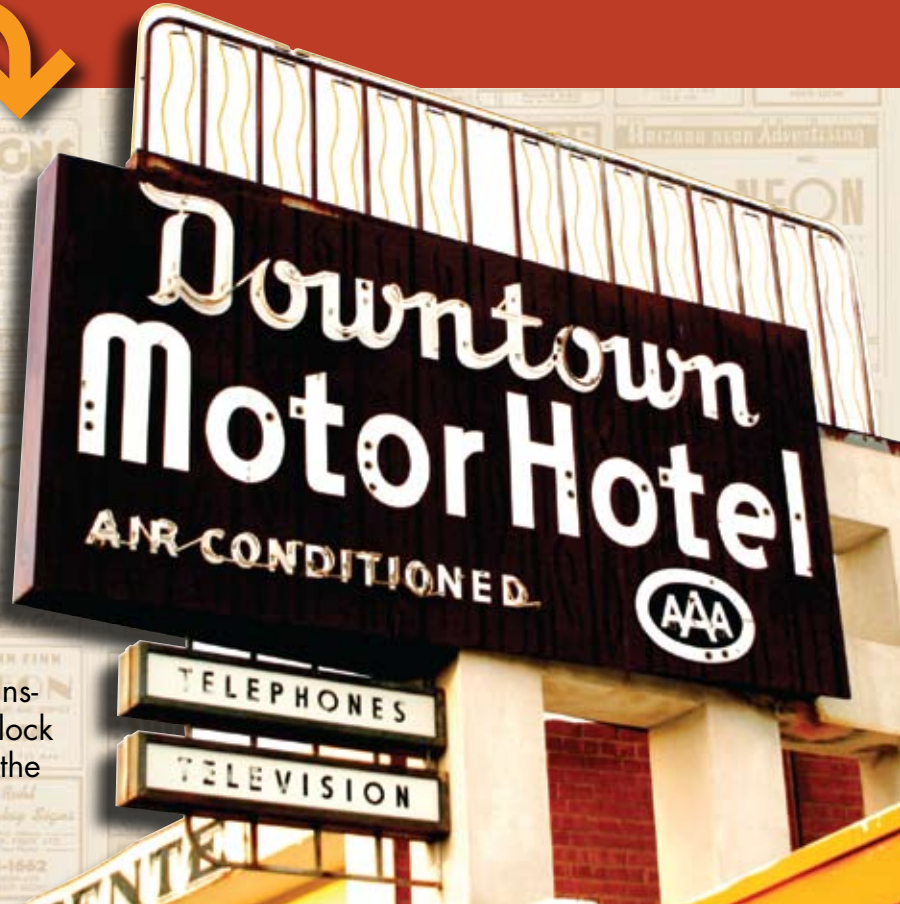
24

383 S. STONE AVE.

Downtown Motor Hotel

This motel was advertised as "The Only Motor Hotel in the Heart of the City." The original pole-mounted neon sign was replaced by the current sign around 1953.

The background of the enamel and neon sign is painted with stylized wood grain. Above this is an open steel lattice encasing an array of vertical squiggly bands and an outline, all in yellow neon. In neon tubing, the word "Downtown" is in a single-tube cursive font, "Motor Hotel" is in a moderne sans-serif font, and "air conditioned" is in simple block letters. A neon AAA badge is also applied to the faux wooden backdrop.





21

526 - 538 E. 9TH ST.

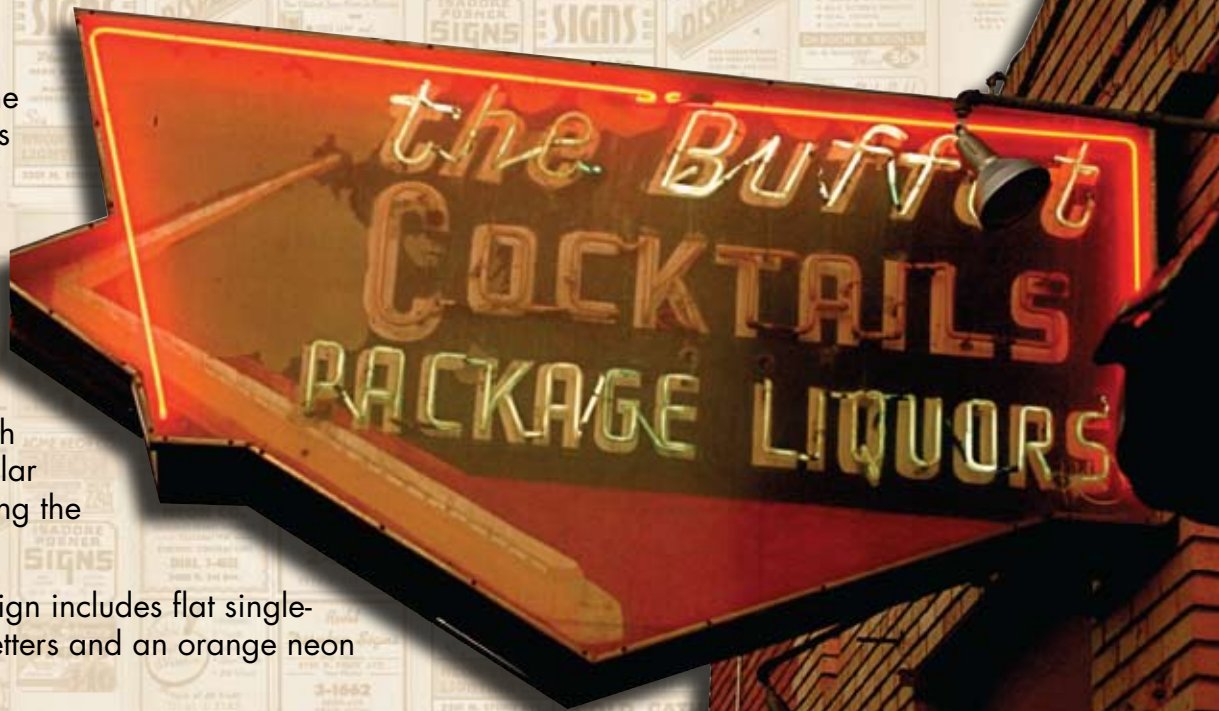
Empire & The Buffet

The roof-mounted Empire Market sign evokes the Empire State Building in both name and streamline style, featuring single-tube flat block letters with eleven embedded vertical neon bands and two floating horizontal bands on each side of the structure.

The building was originally "Joe W. Tang's Market," renamed "Empire Foods" around 1957, the second location of this local chain. The sign is integral to the building's simple art deco architecture.

The Buffet was established in 1934, its name inspired by the buffet car on America's early twentieth century passenger trains. A painted streamlined locomotive and train cars, similar in design to the popular Sunset Limited that ran through Tucson, forms an angular boomerang shape along the edge of the sign.

The projecting blade sign includes flat single-tube italic and block letters and an orange neon outline.





16

1300 N. STONE AVE.

Flamingo Hotel

The Tucson Flamingo Hotel, designed by Lloyd T. Willams & Associates of Phoenix with noted Tucson architect Anne J. Rysdale consulting, opened on 24 January 1954. The monumental vertical pylon-mount neon sign was built in 1963 by Zeon Signs Electrical Products and features pink single-tube cursive channel letters and five single-tube blue neon truncated ellipses, each connecting to a plastic letter spelling "hotel."

The sign exemplifies Space Age design, influenced by cultural developments beginning with the launch of Sputnik I, the first artificial Earth satellite, in 1957. Other channel letter and porcelain neon signs previously adorned the building, but have been removed.

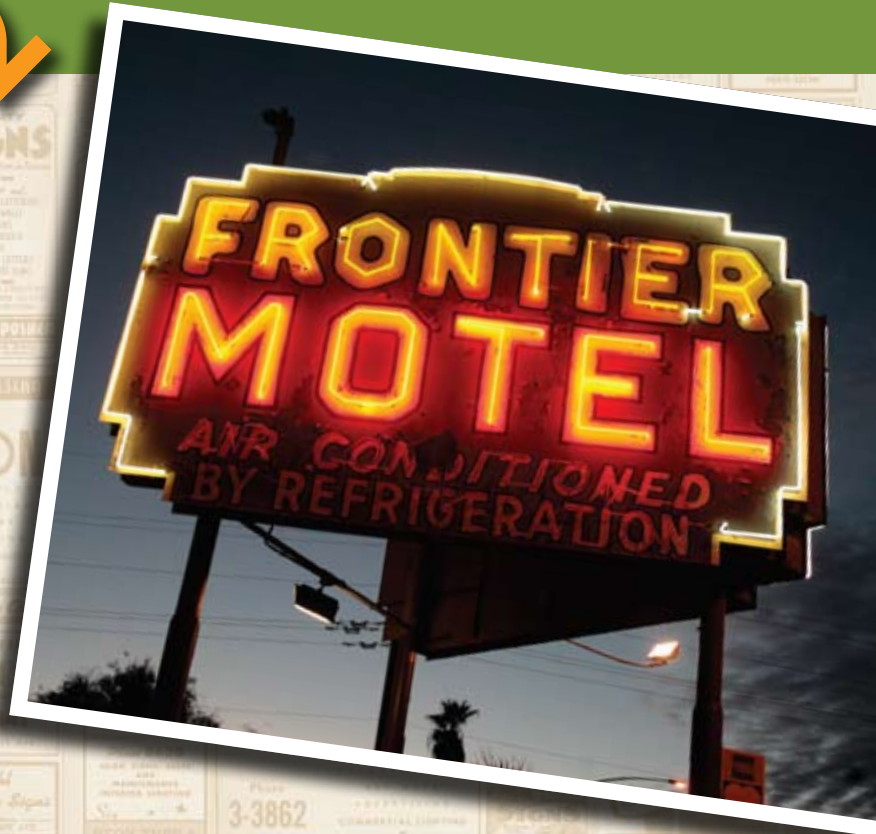
10

227 W. DRACHMAN ST.

Frontier Motel

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Paul opened the Pioneer Motel in September of 1941. They renamed it Frontier Motel and sold it to Mr. and Mrs. Louis Barrasso in 1943.

The 1943 neon double-sided sign is designed in a "frontier revival" style emulating an old wood western motif with boxy flat block, single-tube neon letters and a white neon outline. "Frontier" is yellow; "Motel" is red; "Air Conditioned" is italicized and green; "By Refrigeration" is white.



Ghost Ranch Lodge

Josias Joesler designed the original buildings of Ghost Ranch Lodge which opened in 1941. The lodge was purchased in 1942 by Arthur and Phoebe Pack. Pack was a founder of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum and owner of the famed Ghost Ranch in New Mexico. The sign was constructed in 1952; American Modernist painter Georgia O'Keeffe designed the iconic cow skull as a wedding gift to the Packs.

The sign features stylized Western channel letters with white double-tube neon, and a neon triangle outlining the cow skull. The lower half of the sign was altered to include the word "Restaurant" sometime after 1958.

Originally mounted on a single pole on the eastern edge of the motor court, the sign has been relocated twice and continues to front the original property, which is now senior housing. The property and sign were restored by Atlantic Development and Investments, Inc. in 2010, and received the "Preservation Honor Award" from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, one of the nation's highest honors for historic properties.

GHOST RANCH
LODGE & RESTAURANT



20

311 E. CONGRESS ST.



Hotel Congress

The landmark Hotel Congress was designed by architect William Curlett, and built in 1919. In 1934, a fire destroyed the third story, leading to the only capture of John Dillinger, Public Enemy Number One. Architect Roy Place remodeled the building; the steel-framed billboard roof sign was added around 1940.

The open roof structure consists of a framework of angle iron upon which two lines of individual steel block letters are mounted, outlined with single-tube red neon. The Hotel Congress sign is an icon of the city. The hotel also features other interior and exterior historic neon details.

8

1602 N. ORACLE RD.

La Siesta Motel

The La Siesta Motel retains two original pole-mounted neon signs commissioned in 1940 by owner-operator Fanny Weiner. The large La Siesta Motel sign includes single-tube block and cursive neon in red, green and blue and includes two iconographic stereotypical profile images of a sleeping Mexican with sombrero and serape outlined in yellow neon.

A painted steel box representing a saguaro encloses the pole and extends above the top of the sign to create an archetypical advertising image of the southwest. The smaller office sign of single-tube neon repeats the "rancho" motif.



23

10 N. SWAN RD.



Lucky Wishbone

Lucky Wishbone opened as Tucson's first "fast food" restaurant in the summer of 1953 on South 6th Avenue and quickly expanded to other locations. The Swan Road location was designed and constructed by Jay E. Fuller Construction Co. in 1957 and redesigned by Clyde Cook in 1969.

The neon sign, built by Arizona Neon, includes flashing, radiating irregular neon stars with a central, strobe-like incandescent flash. The sign has become synonymous with the local chain and is a Broadway Boulevard landmark.

13

W. DRACHMAN ST.

Magic Carpet Golf

This sign originally fronted the Magic Carpet miniature golf course at 6125 East Speedway.

Commissioned by Lee Koplín in 1971, the large

scale of the sign and use of decorated plastic reflects signmaking trends toward the end of the post-World War II era. The pole emulates the shape of a golf tee, with the word "Golf" in the ball, upon which a curved panel reads "Magic Carpet." A back-lit plastic genie, inspired by the Joyva Candy logo, rides a carpet atop the sign.

The sign originally featured chasing and flashing incandescent light bulbs, but was re-configured with blinking neon. Chapman Automotive purchased the property for redevelopment and donated the sign to the Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation in 2009. The sign was restored in 2012 by Addisigns, its original fabricator.



MAGIC CARPET

Medina's Sporting Goods



Medina's
SPORTING GOODS
1047

Designed and fabricated by Zeon Signs Electrical Products in 1956, the Medina's sign was originally mounted on the roof at 1047 Main Avenue next door to the Zeon plant. Zeon Signs was established in 1912 and opened a Tucson office in 1953. The company was responsible for many of Tucson's most memorable and eclectic signs including the Indian Village Trading Post Hoop Dancer, Green Lantern/Ye Old Lantern, and the Flamingo Hotel.

The simple Medina's design embodies a classic 1950s industrial motif and contains flat single-tube cursive and block letters. In 2009 the building was demolished and the sign was rescued by the Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation. The sign was restored by Cook and Co. Signmakers in 2011.

4

505 W. MIRACLE MILE

Monterey Court

Established as the Monterey Court in the late 1930s, the name was changed by the early 1940s under the ownership of Mike and Marge Opels to the more contemporary "Monterey Motel." The pole-mounted sign was installed approximately 20 feet east of its current location. The typography of the sign used a single large "M" for both Monterey and Motel.

In 2011, Cook and Co. Signmakers refurbished the sign when the property was adaptively renovated into arts-related retail. The text was changed to "Monterey Court," in homage to the property's original name. Stop in and experience a vintage motor court while visiting the local shops and galleries.





Pat's Chili Dogs

Pat Patterson began his chili dogs and fries career at East Speedway near Alvernon in the 1950s, then moved downtown to the corner of Congress and Church. He opened another location at South 6th Avenue and East Ajo Way before opening the surviving location on Grande just south of Speedway in 1962.

The Pat's sign was designed and constructed in 1962 by the ABCO Sign Company. It features three dimensional red Plexiglas letters encircled by four flashing neon bands recessed in a metal raceway. The drive-in restaurant was designed by Edgar Adams Hollman and continues to serve their famous chili dogs.



22

145 S. 6TH AVE.

Pueblo Hotel and Apartments

The Willard Hotel (1902-1904) was commissioned by Willard Wright and designed in the Spanish Revival style by Architect Henry C. Trost. In 1948 the property was renamed the Pueblo Hotel and Apartments. The landmark sign was manufactured in two phases with "Pueblo Hotel and Apartments" initially. The swimming pool text, and diver were added in 1955 when the pool was installed.

The sign is a local icon; the diving beauty has been poised on her diving board for decades. Both sections were designed and fabricated by the Acme Neon Company under the ownership of Grady L. Beard. The company was active in Tucson from 1929 through 1966. Acme Neon Sign Co. participated in an electrician apprentice program and worked with World War II veterans training programs. The whimsical sign was restored by Cook & Co. Signmakers in 2012.





7

1650 N. ORACLE RD.

Quail Inn

The De Luxe Motel was built in 1936 in the Spanish Revival style by Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Dunlap. After World War II, it was expanded and renamed the Starline Motel – denoted by a Mid-Century Modern neon sign – which eventually evolved into the “Quail Inn.”

The sign features an inverted triangle with a steel star shape outlined with three multicolored neon tubes. The fancy script of “Quail” is created with double-tube white neon. The neon vacancy sign, mounted on a plinth of glass blocks in a classic Art Deco motif, is thought to date from the “De Luxe” period.

2

515 W. MIRACLE MILE



Riviera Motor Lodge

The Riviera Motor Lodge sign's post-World War II "Streamline" design was commissioned by motel owners Mr. and Mrs. Walczak and Mr. and Mrs. Pearson in 1952. The sign, supported by a massive steel post, originally rose from a brick plinth situated in a small reflecting pool. The sign was raised when relocated closer to the buildings, and now projects toward the center of the property.

"Riviera" is spelled out in flat block black-painted sheet steel letters, backed by seven red neon bands. The sign includes flat block, single-tube letters and a neon outline.





17

919 N. STONE AVE.

Sahara (Tidelands) Motor Inn

This sign was installed as part of the Tidelands Motor Inn in 1960. The scale and design of this glowing monument, including double-tube channel letters and a wavy line of chasing incandescent light bulbs weaving in and out of the main structure, indicate 1960s trends.

It was redesigned in 1975, changing the text from "Tidelands" to "Sahara." The words "Motor Inn" were changed to "Apartments" during a renovation in the mid-1990s that adapted the property into student housing.

9

2 W. DRACHMAN ST.

Sparkle Cleaners - Sud'n Service Laundry & Dry Cleaning

The building and sign were constructed in 1955 for Wash Well Drive In Cleaners. The biomorphic palette shape in the upper corner originally had incandescent light bulbs in a channel outline; these were later replaced with neon. The trapezoidal sign includes flat block and cursive, single-tube neon letters. Throughout the 1970s, "Sud'n Service" offered cash prizes for clever sayings submitted by customers for the marquee. The building still houses a dry cleaning service.



LAUNDRY &
DRY CLEANING

Sue's Fish



Sue's Fish opened in 1960. The small pole-mounted steel sign is shaped like a catfish and outlined and detailed in neon featuring flat block letters. The fish is cantilevered from the side of the pole with angle iron. Centered on the pole is a backlit plastic sign with hand painted black letters advertising highlights of the menu. Although the sign is not operational, its imagery and scale are irresistible.

3

564 W. MIRACLE MILE

SunLand Motel

Located on Miracle Mile (Casa Grande Highway, AZ Highway 84) among a dense concentration of vintage neon signs, the SunLand Motel's pole-mounted sign features flat block, single-tube letters and a neon outline. The top of the sign includes a painted mountain range with two saguaro silhouettes. "SunLand" is in red-orange italic neon, and "Motel" in green neon. The original color palette was yellow, brown and white; the current base color is a light green. The motel is still operational, renting rooms by the night.



27

2048 S. 6TH AVE.



T&T Market

The pole-mounted T&T Market sign is on the historic alignment of US Routes 80 and 89 on south 6th Avenue. The street was once festooned with early twentieth century neon signs of which only a few survive. The sign featured red flat block, single-tube letters and an outline of green neon. The shape of the sign is a detail of classic Art Deco.

Later neon additions include a rectangular sign reading "Liquors" and a small sign featuring the "A-1 Pilsner Beer" logo. "A-1" was a 1940s product of the Arizona Brewing Company, which was started in Phoenix, just after the end of Prohibition. Between 1942 and 1958, the logo featured an eagle which was changed following a threatened copyright lawsuit by Anheuser-Busch. The A-1 sign is a relic of Arizona's brewing history.

26

328 W. 29TH ST.

Valencia Market

One of a handful of surviving functional neighborhood markets, "Valencia Market" retains its original double-sided roof-mounted art deco style sign.

The inverted 'T' shape of the sign features flat block, single-tube letters spelling "Valencia," the horizontal portion spelling "Market." Each letter is white with a red outline.



5

2649 N. ORACLE RD.



Tiki Motel

Built as the Oracle Motel by Mr. and Mrs. Luther R. Campbell, the original Art Deco monument sign was lost by the late mid-twentieth century when the property was renamed the "Tiki Motel." The Polynesian-inspired sign was designed and constructed by Zeon Electrical Products Company in 1963.

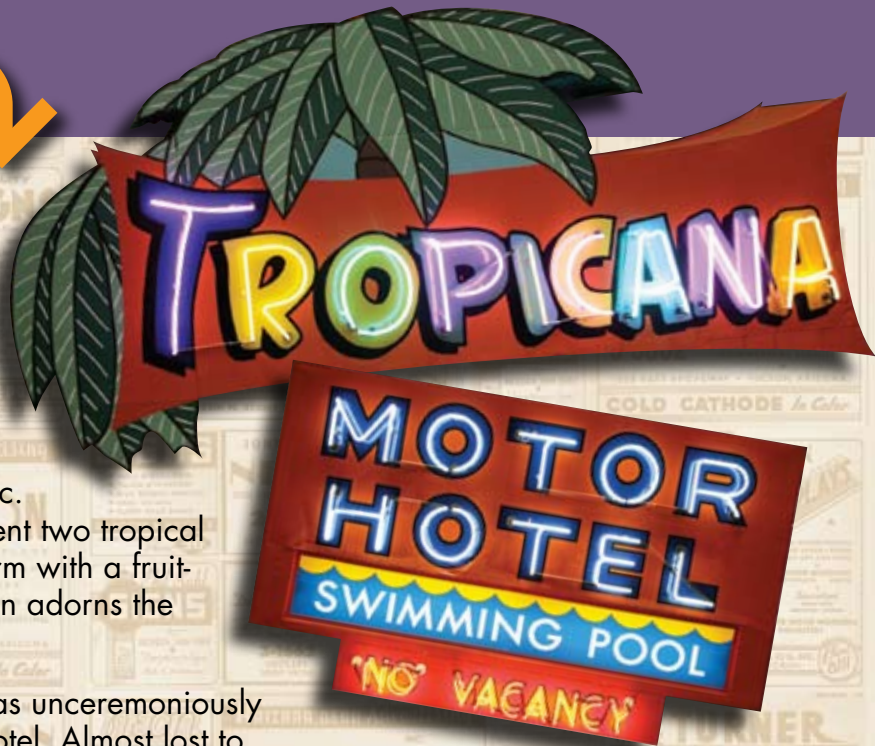
The sign's details include a once-flashing red, ruby red and canary yellow simulated neon flame, a brown simulated wooden Polynesian/Maori war shield, and a white painted sheet steel Tiki mask. Integrated into the sign is backlit plastic reading "Motel," and beneath that, the ubiquitous word in neon: "Vacancy."

Tropicana Motor Hotel

Originally located at 617 Casa Grande Highway, AZ Highway 84, (today's "Miracle Mile"), the Tropicana sign was commissioned by motel owner B. Migliore in 1960, and manufactured by Arizona Neon Advertising, Inc.

The pole-mounted sign was designed to represent two tropical palm trees and a classic 1950s/60s design form with a fruit-loop color palette. Single-tube multicolored neon adorns the flat block letters.

The sign was a luminescent landmark until it was unceremoniously cut down in 2004 with the demolition of the motel. Almost lost to the scrap yard, the sign was rescued by Lance Lesney, who donated it to the Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation in early 2011. The exuberant sign was beautifully restored in August 2011 by Cook and Co. Signmakers. The restoration of this sign would have been impossible without the generous support of Buffalo Exchange.



TUCSON

INN

MONKEY





143 W. DRACHMAN ST.



Tucson Inn

Architect Ann Rysdale designed the Tucson Inn in 1953. The sign and the port-cochere were added in the following years. The sign is a fanned series of pole-mounted rectangular cabinets with channel block, quadruple-tube letters spelling "TUCSON." The lower half of the sign features a large arrow of flashing incandescent light bulbs surrounding the word "INN."

Other neon signs on the property included a wall-mounted flat sign on the east façade and a roof-mounted sign advertising the restaurant. This huge sign is a premiere Tucson icon that has appeared in countless promotional materials and even inspired the logo of an international entertainment company.





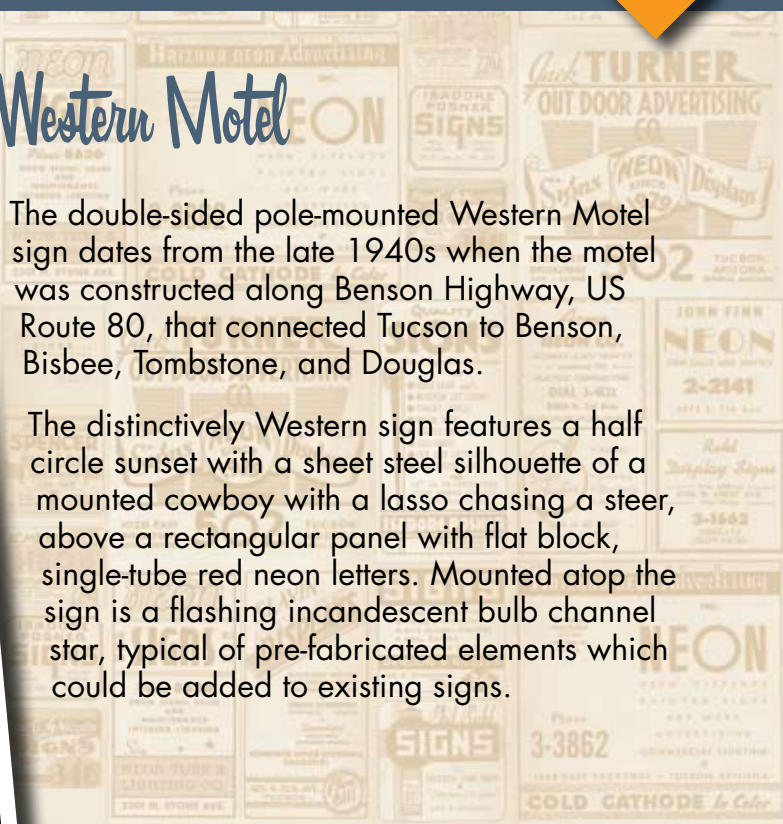
30

3218 E. BENSON HWY.

Western Motel

The double-sided pole-mounted Western Motel sign dates from the late 1940s when the motel was constructed along Benson Highway, US Route 80, that connected Tucson to Benson, Bisbee, Tombstone, and Douglas.

The distinctively Western sign features a half circle sunset with a sheet steel silhouette of a mounted cowboy with a lasso chasing a steer, above a rectangular panel with flat block, single-tube red neon letters. Mounted atop the sign is a flashing incandescent bulb channel star, typical of pre-fabricated elements which could be added to existing signs.



Thank You

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Arizona Humanities Council

Sharing cultures. Enriching communities.



TUCSON
HISTORIC
PRESERVATION
FOUNDATION

preservetucson.org

A photograph of the Tucson Courthouse tower and a neon sign. The tower is a white silhouette against a dark sky. The neon sign is red and reads "HOTEL COLLEGE" in a stylized, blocky font. The sign is mounted on a metal structure and is illuminated from below, making it glow. The background is a dark, clear sky.