

Fast Facts

Aztec Brewing Company Rathskeller Collection

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The original Aztec Brewing Company was established in 1921 in Mexicali, Mexico during Prohibition in the United States. It was the maker of ABC Beer, which was very popular in Mexico, and won a gold medal at the 1929 International Exposition in Seville, Spain. When Prohibition was repealed in 1933, the Aztec Brewing Company moved north to the Barrio Logan neighborhood of San Diego, and into a building on Main Street formerly occupied by a tire factory. After an extensive remodel that included the installation of technologically advanced brewing equipment, the Aztec Brewing Company flourished, becoming one of the largest breweries on the West Coast.



Aztec Brewing Co. building with rathskeller on the right, c. 1935,
© San Diego History Center

The Aztec Brewing Company featured a lavishly decorated beer tasting room known as the rathskeller. The rathskeller was a primary example of Art Deco Mexican/Hollywood style inspired by the movie industry of the 1920s and 1930s and was also influenced by regional sociocultural developments. The rathskeller featured two colorful murals by Jose Moya del Pino, an internationally recognized Spanish artist who had been influenced by Mexican muralists such as Diego Rivera. In addition to murals, the rathskeller's furnishings included a large tiled bar and wrought iron chandeliers, as well as stained glass windows, wooden doors, painted ceiling beams, and intricate painted and molded plaster beam caps.

The Aztec Brewing Company was in operation in San Diego until 1948 when it was sold to Altes Brewing Company, which closed its doors in the 1950s. After the brewery closure, the buildings were used as warehouses. By the 1980s, the buildings had been sold a number of times and were slated for destruction to accommodate new development. A grassroots effort among artists and residents of Barrio Logan to preserve the rathskeller and its furnishings began. This community activism led to the designation of the rathskeller furnishings as historically significant by the San Diego Historical Resource Board in 1988. The buildings were demolished in 1990 and the rathskeller collection was donated to the City of San Diego.



Inside the Aztec Brewing Company rathskeller c. 1937, © San Diego History Center

The brewery's Mexican origin, its location in the San Diego neighborhood of Barrio Logan, and the original artwork by the artist, Jose Moya del Pino, became increasingly significant in the context of the modern Chicano art movement. Barrio Logan is home to Chicano Park, the largest collection of Chicano murals in the world and an entry on the National Register of Historic Places.

The exhibition of the collection from the Aztec Brewing Company's rathskeller is the culmination of decades of work by the City of San Diego to preserve, restore and prepare the collection for display in a public setting. The restoration of the collection was funded in part by a Community Development Block Grant provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Fine art conservation services were provided by Balboa Art Conservation Center, and furnishing restoration services were provided by Sculpture Conservation Studio and specialized handling services were provided by Artworks San Diego.

ABOUT THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO COMMISSION FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

The City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture (Commission) serves in an advisory capacity to the Mayor and City Council on promoting, encouraging and increasing support for the region's artistic and cultural assets, integrating arts and culture into community life and showcasing San Diego as an international tourist destination. The Commission provides meaningful aesthetic and cultural experiences for San Diego's residents and visitors and honors the history and heritage of San Diego through the installation of culturally significant works from the City's Civic Art Collection in public spaces. The Commission is composed of 15 volunteers appointed by the Mayor and is supported by a staff of professional arts administrators. Visit www.VibrantCultureVibrantCity.com.