

La Taqueria, the Mission's most famous taqueria, finds its future in doubt with controversial building sale

Oct. 19, 2018 Updated: Oct. 19, 2018 5:04 p.m.



Matt Seiter, of Charlotte, North Carolina, checks his phone as he and his wife Courtney Seiter (partially seen second from left) leave La Taqueria on Wednesday, Sept. 10, 2014 in San Francisco. The Seiters had read the burrito review of Anna Maria Barry-Jester, FiveThirtyEight's burrito correspondent, and came to La Taqueria to try the burrito. Photo: Lea Suzuki / The Chronicle



People have lunch at La Taqueria in San Francisco on March 15th, 2017. Customers at La Taqueria will soon spy a new sign tacked onto the front window: "For Sale." Photo: John Storey / Special to the Chronicle 2017



The interior of La Taqueria in San Francisco, Calif., is seen on March 15th, 2017. Photo: John Storey / Special to the Chronicle

Customers at La Taqueria will soon spy a new sign tacked onto the front window: For Sale.

Miguel Jara, 77, and his immediate family have owned the San Francisco taqueria, as well as the building that houses the business, since 1972, and lines continue to spill from the doorway all through the day and evening. But now a

court-ordered sale, mediated by a receiver, has Jara bidding on his own building — and threatening to move La Taqueria from its iconic spot if he loses out to another buyer.

The building at Mission and 25th streets, in fact, has been listed online since March. In June, Jara [told The Chronicle](#) that it was due to an inheritance dispute that had ended up in court. The troubles that San Francisco's most famous taqueria faces is a reminder that many kinds of tensions threaten businesses that are assumed to have achieved permanence. Earlier this month, [the Mission's first panaderia, La Victoria](#), closed due to an intra-familial dispute, and last year [Britex moved from its Union Square home of 65 years](#) after the founder's heirs collectively sold the building while one branch of the family continued to run the fabric store.

“When I opened the taco place, I had no credit, no checking account. My father helped me and put it in my father's name and my mother's name,” Jara said. His father, Heminio, died in 1990 and his mother, Clodoalda, in 2000.

Jara said he never took the time to transfer ownership of the building, and his mother didn't leave a will. However, according to his lawyer Jim Quadra of Quadra Coll, Jara had paid the mortgage, property taxes and upkeep on the building since the 1970s.

- Unlimited Digital Access for 99¢
- Read more articles like this by subscribing to the San Francisco Chronicle

Jara said that the sale was unrelated to the more than \$500,000 in unpaid health care costs, lost wages and fines that La Taqueria has paid its workers during the past 12 months after [four workers filed a series of complaints](#) with the city and state.

According to Steven Hassing, who represents six of Miguel Jara's siblings, his brothers and sisters assumed for decades that he owned the building. “They knew nothing about the fact that they had inherited an interest in that building,” Hassing said. “They only found out when Miguel wanted to do some estate planning and asked the siblings to sign quit-claim deeds.”



Ajesh Shah (l to r) of San Francisco and Julie Monin of Brazil enjoy burrito dorados during their lunch at La Taqueria on Wednesday, Sept. 10, 2014 in San Francisco. Customers at La Taqueria will soon spy a new sign tacked onto the front window: “For Sale.”

Photo: Lea Suzuki / The Chronicle 2014

Two of Jara’s siblings turned their shares over to him, giving him officially a third of the interest in the building. When some refused to sign the paperwork transferring their one-ninth shares to him, Hassing said Miguel Jara sued for ownership. The court decided against him. After a series of appeals, this spring the San Francisco Superior Court appointed a receiver, Susan Uecker, to handle the sale, and designated Cushman and Wakefield as the real estate agents. Uecker has not responded to requests for comment.

“We had an appraisal on the building at \$1.25 million,” Miguel Jara said, “so I sent them a letter, saying so I don’t have to keep paying lawyers and you don’t have to pay lawyers, I’ll give you \$127,000 each. We got a reply from the lawyer saying they wouldn’t accept the deal.” Hassing’s email, in fact, warned Jara that La Taqueria had no lease, and he should consider trying to trademark its name, intimating that a new buyer might take over the business.

“It’s a lot deeper than a family dispute,” Miguel’s son Angel, who runs the business, said. “I think my dad’s brothers and sisters are being malicious and trying to drive up the price.”

The receiver has not allowed Miguel Jara to submit a bid on his property until another bid was received. Quadra said that she notified the business last week that she had received a credible offer for \$1.6 million, and La Taqueria was required to post the For Sale sign, which Angel Jara taped up on Thursday.

The Jaras will be allowed to offer a counter bid at a court-mandated auction on Nov. 13.

“We anticipate he’s going to bid higher and that the property will remain in the family, that will be the home of La Taqueria, hopefully forever,” Quadra said. At the same time, the attorney is appealing the original court decision, arguing malpractice on the part of Jara’s previous lawyer.

If Miguel Jara cannot submit a winning bid, court documents state that he will turn the property over to the new owner within 60 days.

Jara said that if that happens, he might look for a way to move the business. “My thinking is that there’s a building for sale around there I could buy right now if I could stay (in the current building) for a year while I remodel the place, but I don’t know,” he said. He worries about his employees, many of whom have been with the business for more than a decade.

“We’re in a pretty precarious situation,” he said.