

Argonaut moving its history, spirits to bigger space

Store will be steps east of current site, opening in October

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The storied Argonaut, one of the oldest and most successful liquor stores in the Denver area, is getting a new home after about a half-century at its current site on East Colfax Avenue in Capitol Hill.

Customers bought more than a million bottles of wine and 8 million bottles of beer there last year. If you were one of them, don't worry, you only have to travel a couple of more steps to fill up on libations.

The Argonaut Wine & Liquor store is moving into an \$8 million, energy-efficient building on the parking lot immediately to the east, which last was occupied by a small Asian restaurant that closed a year ago.

If all goes well, the old 22,000- square-foot store will be closed only for about a day in October, as the inventory is moved into the three-level building at Colfax and Clarkson Street.

It will be twice as big as the current store.

The last time the store was renovated was almost 35 years ago, when brothers Hank and Jack Robinson began construction on the current store in 1973. It replaced a tiny store at Colfax and Washington Street that had been built in the 1950s, before the Robinsons bought it in the mid-1960s.

Argonaut has been in the hands of the Robinson family for about 40 years, but the store can trace its roots back much longer, Scott Robinson said Monday.

It used to be near the Argonaut Hotel along Colfax, about five blocks to the west, said Robinson, who is a partner with brother Jeff Robinson at Hampton Development Co., the developer.

"Legend has it, they were bootlegging in the store during Prohibition, and they went legit when Prohibition ended," he said.

The liquor store is owned by Ellen Robinson, Scott's wife; Hank Robinson, Scott and Jeff's uncle; and Ron Vaughn, Hank's son-in-law.

The Buchanan Yonushewski Group is designing and building the new store.

The development group hopes to construct a giant sign of a cork popping out of a champagne bottle. Such a prominent architectural feature will require a variance from the city.

"I've been involved with Colfax for many, many years, and to be honest with you, I think this is the most important development we've seen along Colfax," architect Brad Buchanan said.

The new store will be able to handle about 25 percent more customers. The property also includes another 40,000 square feet of surface parking from land being leased from nearby St. John's Cathedral.

The Robinsons are proud of the "green" features, which will include 5 to 10 kilowatts of solar power, nontoxic paint, energy-efficient lighting and low-water-use plumbing and fixtures, some recycled materials, and the most energy-efficient heating and cooling systems on the market.

"This will be the "greenest" liquor store in the world," Scott Robinson said.

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Argonaut Wine & Liquor at a glance

* **Address:** 700 E. Colfax Ave.

* **Estimated annual sales:** 1.3 million bottles of wine, 8 million bottles of beer, 500,000 bottles of liquor

* **Size of current store:** 22,000 square feet

* **New store size:** 40,000 square feet

* **Scheduled opening:** October

* **Architect:** Buchanan Yonushewski Group

* **Features of new store:** Temperature-controlled fine-wine rooms, tasting area, better lighting, two times as much cooler space and 60 percent more display area

* **Green features:** Solar power, recycled materials, high-efficiency heating and cooling systems, high-performance glazing.

* **Why are they expanding?** "You've been in the store, you know why," Jeff Robinson said.

* **What took you so long?** "That's the better question," Robinson said with a laugh.