

**■ INSIDE**

Letters	2
News	3
Crime Watch	4
First Person	11
Home Sales	14
Books	15

**■ RETAIL REPORT****Neckpieces, Now Showing**

A Fillmore boutique's unusual local treasure

PAGE 5

**■ PHOTOGRAPHY****Getting to Know the Neighbors**

An artist's project helps strengthen community ties

PAGE 12

# THE NEW FILLMORE

SAN FRANCISCO ■ NOVEMBER 2013

**'Tis autumn**

Photograph by  
PAULETTE TAVORMINA

New York artist Paulette Tavormina's exquisite photographs of food and flora are in collections worldwide, and now they are available locally at March, the emporium of food-related products and designs at 3075 Sacramento Street. Tavormina's dramatic images reflect the sumptuous detail of 17th century Dutch, Spanish and Italian still life paintings, yet in a contemporary medium and with a modern approach. "I have blended decades of photography and food styling with a love of 17th century old master paintings to create these still life photographs," she says.

## Women's Clinic Gets a New Mission

CARLINA HANSEN — executive director of the Women's Community Clinic at 1833 Fillmore — might seem an unlikely cheerleader for the onrushing changes in health care reform, which are ostensibly aimed at doing away with her clinic's client base of uninsured and underinsured women.

But rather than close its doors and declare its mission accomplished, the clinic is expanding beyond its previous brief of providing free or low-cost reproductive and sexual health care services to offer primary care as well.

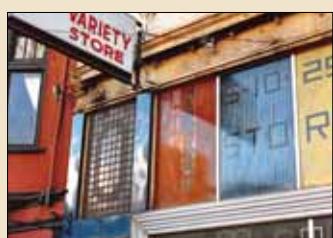
"It's a big exciting change," Hansen says of the Affordable Care Act. "I hear a lot of folks who are critical — mostly that it didn't go far enough. But it sends a message to people who were overlooked that their health is valuable and that they deserve good medical care."

To gear up, the clinic is adding a medical director and primary care nurse practitioner to its staff of 30, which is complemented by 150 volunteers. And beginning next month, the clinic will add an additional staff member to begin helping clients enroll in newly available insurance plans.

"It's very exciting for our clients," says Hansen. "People are so happy coming here. Now we'll be able to meet their broader needs."

In operation since 1999, the Women's Community Clinic relocated from Hayes Street to new and expanded offices on Fillmore in March 2011.

"The thing is that change is hard," says Hansen. "There will be bumps. But the base message is: It's for the patients — and a step in the right direction."

**BEFORE FILLMORE WAS HOT**

Now fashion retailers are willing to pay top dollar for a shop on Fillmore, but that wasn't the case just a few years ago.

PAGES 7-11

**Aloha by the Bay**  
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## FURTHERMORE



## The Race for Space on Fillmore

TO THE EDITORS:

Thank you very much for the October issue discussing the changes along Fillmore Street. You sought the input from several people with opposing viewpoints and printed them all without editorializing. Your October issue could be a manual for presenting controversial subjects. I've been reading your newspaper for years, but this was your best issue ever.

NONI RICHEN

COMMENTS FROM FACEBOOK:

I just read the gushy front page story re: how a young LA realtor turned Fillmore Street into Beverly Hills North. Real story: How was this allowed? How/when will it end? It's really a failure of the Pacific Heights neighborhood to regulate development, and to have its own vision for growth, vitality and change. So now we essentially have an outdoor mall international shopping destination instead of a neighborhood. Are eateries and coffee shops next? We've already lost a hardware store, postal outlet, laundromat — things most other neighborhoods might have. Is the almighty \$\$ that overpowering? What about neighborhood character?

MATTHEW GILREATH

So basically this is the guy who is killing small business in the Fillmore, bringing large scale retailers to the area, making [landlords] even richer and completely making the Fillmore a corporate chain street. Awesome.

BRIAN MONNIER

I never even see people in those shops! Who is shopping here?! \$300 T-shirts. George Clooney's smug cloud is about to return and destroy SF again. Alert South Park. I say we should picket while eating a bunch of Dino's pizza.

LAURA TURNER

## Noe Valley? Really?

Re: "Pacific Heights Is Cheap Compared to Noe Valley," October issue: To me, this is most shocking. Noe has horrible windy weather and few decent restaurants.

JOHN SNETSINGER

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[editors@newfillmore.com](mailto:editors@newfillmore.com)

Editors | Barbara Kate Repa & Thomas R. Reynolds  
Production Editor | Ginny Lindsay Copy Editor | Donna Gillespie  
Marketing Manager | Alison Short

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## Fillmore Loses Its Mayor

Ruth Dewson, longtime owner of Mrs. Dewson's Hats, dies

**S**HE CAME to California from Paris, Texas, and worked for the telephone company in Los Angeles for many years. But it was only when Ruth Garland Dewson moved north to San Francisco and opened a hat shop on Fillmore Street that she found her true home.

She ran Mrs. Dewson's Hats at 2050 Fillmore for four decades, closing only reluctantly last year at the end of April. She had already moved herself into AgeSong, a home for seniors in Hayes Valley. Vigorous and opinionated until the end, she died early on Monday morning, October 28, soon after being taken to Kaiser Permanente Hospital, just a few blocks from Fillmore. She was 74.

Ruth Dewson gave full meaning to the phrase larger than life. A full-throated statuesque black woman — and proud of it — she was not shy about claiming her place in the forefront of San Francisco's parade of colorful personalities. Former Mayor Willie Brown was a walking billboard for her hat shop. And her final Christmas card included her



*"Fillmore Street for me has been a wonderful, wonderful thing."*

— RUTH GARLAND DEWSON  
1939 - 2013

picture with a beaming President Obama.

"I'm not known for not knowing the right people," she said in an interview a few months ago, recalling how she started the Fillmore Jazz Festival and then got friends in City Hall to put a parking lot on California Street. She called herself the Mayor of Fillmore Street, and so did many others.

"Fillmore Street for me has been a wonderful, wonderful thing," she said. "I just can't tell you how much I have enjoyed Fillmore."

### IN MEMORY OF

**T**he staff and management at MIO mourn the recent passing of our beloved friend and fellow employee, Linda Raye Minor.

Linda was a resident of the Fillmore neighborhood for thirty five years and sales manager at KOZO 1983 to 1986 and MIO 1986 to 2013.

We will miss her magical smile, elegant fashion sense and most importantly her beautiful window displays.

*A memorial service will be held Saturday, November 9, 2013  
10 a.m. at St. Dominic's Lady Chapel, 2390 Bush St. at Steiner St.  
Parking area adjacent to Chapel, Pierce St. entry.*

*Donations can be sent in memory of Linda Minor  
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## CRIME WATCH

### Aggravated Assault

Fillmore and Eddy Streets

September 22, 3:40 p.m.

A cab driver approached an officer, asking for assistance in removing a passenger who had passed out in the rear of his cab. The officer tried to rouse the man, who seemed in a deep sleep. The man grunted at the officer, but would not move. The cab's interior was filled with an overpowering smell of alcohol. The officer made a second attempt and eventually succeeded in getting the man out of the cab. He then tried to get the intoxicated man to sit down on the sidewalk, but the man resisted aggressively and veered off into the roadway. The officer grabbed him to prevent him from walking into moving traffic. Then the man swung a fist at the officer. When the cab driver tried to assist, the suspect bit him on the forearm. Additional officers arrived and helped subdue the man. The suspect was handcuffed and booked at county jail.

### Theft From Unlocked Vehicle

Washington and Octavia Streets

September 28, 9:35 a.m.

Officers received a call about a theft that occurred during the Breast Cancer Walk. A witness saw a man walk several times around an ambulance that was on site, then enter the driver's side of the vehicle. The witness notified a security guard, who approached the man and said, "Hey, you don't belong in here."

As the suspect got out of the ambulance, the guard saw him put a small black object into his pocket. The guard detained him and contacted the ambulance crew. When police arrived and searched the man, they found a cell phone in his pocket. Crew members identified the phone as their property, and it was returned to the owner. The suspect was booked at Northern Station.

### Driving While Intoxicated

Divisadero and Pine Streets

September 29, 12:03 a.m.

An officer on patrol saw a man who was texting while driving in violation of the vehicle code and conducted a traffic stop. While advising the driver of the reason he was being stopped, the officer detected a strong odor of alcohol inside the car. As he attempted to query the driver about his consumption of alcoholic beverages, the man became combative and refused to answer any questions. He was booked at county jail for driving while intoxicated.

### Robbery Involving a Gun

Bush and Broderick Streets

September 30, 10:55 p.m.

Officers received a call about a street

robbery. Arriving at the scene, officers contacted the two people who had been robbed who said they were approached by two men, one of whom was carrying a semi-automatic handgun. As directed, the two handed over their iPhones. The robbed individuals were unharmed, and were able to give the police a good description of the two male suspects, who were not immediately located.

### Possession of Burglary Tools

Baker and Jackson Streets

October 4, 10:17 p.m.

Officers received a report that a known burglary suspect had been observed in the area. Arriving at the scene, they attempted to contact an individual who matched the description. The man saw the police and ran, fleeing west on Jackson Street. The officers then began a search of the area. Eventually they found the man lying on the ground; he had tripped during his flight from the police. A check showed he was a parolee with an outstanding warrant for his arrest. When the officers searched him, they found he was carrying a variety of burglary tools. The suspect was booked at county jail.

### Attempted Robbery

Post and Steiner Streets

October 12, 1:45 p.m.

Two women walking together were approached by a man who tried to snatch the iPhone one of them was carrying. During the struggle, he knocked the woman to the ground. Responding officers called for an ambulance when they saw the woman's injuries. While conducting their initial interview and broadcasting descriptions of the assailant, the officers were approached by two witnesses who had recovered a wallet from the ground about 50 yards from the attempted robbery. Evidently the robber had dropped his wallet while fleeing. The wallet contained his ID, so officers were able to track him down. He was arrested and booked into county jail.

### Robbery

Pierce and Sacramento Streets

October 17, 12:10 a.m.

Officers received a report of a street robbery. The man who had been robbed said he was walking home when he was approached by two men, one of whom was holding a semi-automatic pistol. The two ordered him to lie on the ground. Then they took his wallet and his cell phone, and ordered him to stay on the ground as they fled. Multiple units searched for the suspects but failed to find them. The investigation is ongoing.

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A designer inspired by her worldwide travels, Roberta Freymann has burrowed a special niche into her devotees' hearts with her eye-catching neckpieces. But she might have outdone herself with the collection of baubles, bangles and beads that are just becoming available at her local boutique at 2055 Fillmore.

"They're great statement pieces — every girl should have one," says sales associate Dominique Littleton, smiling as if smitten herself. She recommends donning one with an army green shirtdress, for example, for the proverbial desk to dinner suitability. She even advocates tying one on to add an unexpected pop of glamour to a T-shirt and jeans. Could also give new ooh-la-la to that little black dress.

The neckwear collection includes sophisticated ropes of pliable gold, blown glass assemblages, rustic creations of muted natural stones and pointed-collar necklaces made of grey or rose beads that look almost prim — until the eye gets to the jaunty rhinestone clasp, which is magnetic and joins in the front, obviating that annoying need for an extra pair of helping hands.

Some of the neck creations are free-form beaded, some attached to silk backings and tied in bows at the back, and most are adjustable in length to accommodate the wearer's stature or accompanying clothing neckline. Prices range from \$100 to \$350, but most hover around \$165.

You can get a preview of the fall and holiday collections at a trunk show on Thursday, November 14, from 6 to 8 p.m. Prosecco and cupcakes will be offered, along with the eye candy neckwear. RSVP at 563-8595.

**RETAIL REPORT****A Familiar Name in a New Location**

Long a Fillmore mainstay, Mio opens a second location on Sacramento

**T**HE SHOP at 3314 Sacramento Street — longtime home to sweater purveyor Three Bags Full — recently reopened under a shingle familiar to neighborhood regulars: Mio. The store is a second location for the women's clothing boutique that has operated at 2035 Fillmore for nearly three decades.

"I still love this neighborhood, but Sacramento Street kind of reminds me of Fillmore in the old days," says owner Miyo Ota, who has spearheaded the movement against retail chain stores on Fillmore Street. "I like the challenge of seeing what the neighborhood there needs and wants. I'm still testing the waters until I figure it out."

To that end, Ota changes the Sacramento shop's inventory every two weeks — a curated collection skewed toward casual tops and tees and wearable art jackets. The shop also stocks some jewelry, purses, scarves, socks and the ubiquitous fashion necessity for San Francisco winter: umbrellas. And it includes a selection of Go Silk garments not offered at the Fillmore location.



*"Sacramento Street kind of reminds me of Fillmore in the old days."*

— MIYO OTA  
owner of Mio, now also at 3314 Sacramento (above)

The small Sacramento Street shop gives a first peek to shoppers new to Mio's offerings, but also serves as a feeder to the larger store on Fillmore. "A lot of our established customers live in the area and know the depth and wealth of the inventory at the larger store," Ota says.

Although mirrors adorning the walls make the shop seem larger than its square footage, there are creative challenges in operating such a small retail space.

"We stock mostly things that are easy and don't require much of a dressing room," Ota says. The store contains only a tiny curtained-off alcove, which doubles as the area for wrapping merchandise.

Sales associate Pat Bourne says many of the items are "one size fits all"

to eliminate the need for stocking multiples.

Bourne also says the location — near a hardware store and dry cleaner — make it a good draw for passersby. "It's really the perfect spot for people who are in an errand mode and find they have a few extra minutes on their parking meters to come in and browse," she says.

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In the 1980s, Sugar's Broiler held down the corner of Fillmore and Sacramento, and a new store next door called Fillamento was beginning to attract attention.

# The Way We Were

Fillmore Street wasn't such a desirable destination just a few years ago

A LOOK BACK | BY CHRIS BARNETT

**B**ACK IN 1979, a young leasing broker named Carol Chait was asked by her new boss at the Edward Plant Company: "What's your farm?" In the brokerage world, that's code for the turf you're working. Chait looked down a bleak street that knifed from Pacific Heights south through the Western Addition and saw lots of empty storefronts and plenty of trash. "Fillmore," she said. "I'm farming the Fillmore."

Chait, who is a top producer today in West

Hollywood, warmed to the task by putting sports shoe retailer Fleet Feet into a closet-sized space on Chestnut Street at a then-pricy rent of \$2 a square foot. Next she started schmoozing Fillmore landlords.

Her first connection was Kwong Dong, who owned Sugar's Broiler at Fillmore and Sacramento, where Peet's Coffee & Tea is located today. "Mr. Dong owned the building and cooked the most delicious hamburgers and steak fries," recalls Chait. "He would make me

take food for the entire staff back to the Plant office."

In those days, the two blocks of Fillmore between Clay and California were the prime blocks for retailers; south of California was a desolate strip of lifeless shops and joints. Chait broke through that barrier when she listed the Art Deco Asia Cafe space that had been vacant for a couple of years. She narrowed it down to two prospective tenants.

TO PAGE 8 ▶

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# Not Long Ago, Fillmore Was Still a Diamond in the Rough

► FROM PAGE 7

"Restaurateur Sam DuVall saw the space as a diamond in the rough," Chait says. "It was a bookee joint with a card room and the Croatians from Tadich Grill used to hang out there." Jeremiah Tower — the former Chez Panisse chef who later opened Stars near City Hall — was the other bidder for the space.

Chait had to choose between the men, who were both willing to pay \$2 a foot plus a percentage of the gross revenue. Her decision was driven by one thing: a dead rat.

"I was showing the space to Jeremiah," Chait says. "There was crap all over the floor and all of a sudden I saw this rat in the corner. It was dead, but I was afraid to pick it up. I asked Jeremiah to put it in the trash, but he didn't want to touch it either. Later that day, I was showing the space to Mr. DuVall and I said 'Sam, would you do me a favor and get rid of that thing?' He did — and he also had the best ideas for revitalizing the restaurant. I said to the owner, 'Sam's your guy.'"

Chait adds that DuVall did a painstaking restoration of the space, renaming it The Elite Cafe. "The Elite did such enormous volume even on that block that the owner, with his rent and percentage, got this windfall of cash," she says. "It was \$8,000 a month — then."

But in those days, finding a merchant to move into a local storefront was a tough job. Landlord/fry cook Qwong Dong also owned a 3,400-square foot white elephant of a



*Sam DuVall and Jeremiah Tower vied for the empty space that had housed the Asia Cafe, which became the Elite Cafe.*

building on Fillmore between California and Sacramento, formerly Florence's Variety Store, that had been collecting dust for several years.

"Mr. Dong didn't really care about the rent," says Chait. "He wanted a tenant who would put in the effort to renovate it." He found that and more in a go-getter named Iris Fuller, who had a dream of creating an emporium filled with designer housewares she would call Filamento. She

was smart and savvy and totally committed to her concept, but had little money and no backers, the broker remembers. But that didn't stop her.

"Iris got merchandise on consignment. Her husband was the electrician. She and her kids painted the place," Chait says. "Mr. Dong was happy. He wasn't worried about her financials. He just wanted a nice person in his building who really wanted to be there. Besides, he and Iris were both about 4'11" — and they saw eye to eye on things."

Chait wasn't just Fillmore's power broker in those days. She was the only leasing broker working the street and was doing any deals she could. She brokered a lease for 93-year-old Alice Quigley, who owned a tiny storefront at 2484 Sacramento Street a couple of doors east of Fillmore. But it was a touchy transaction.

"A metalsmith was working and living in the store, sleeping on a cot, paying \$35 a month," says Chait. Eventually, he moved out and she leased the space in 1984 to a former set designer named Fletcher McLean, who turned it into a vintage candy store. The 300-square-foot space fetched \$1.75 a foot, below the \$2 going rate for stores with a Fillmore address. Chait said McLean grew weary of selling bags of candies for small change and wanted out of his lease. She found a merchant wannabe named Beverly Weinkauf who had an idea for a fine lingerie shop in an intimate space. Last month, Toujours celebrated its 27th year in business.

In the early 1980s, Chait says Fillmore Street "just poked along." In search of more action, she moved south, where a dreary stretch of Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood was just starting to be transformed into a bustling gay mecca. Another Edward Plant leasing broker, neighborhood resident Pam Mendelsohn, took over Chait's farm. Rents were starting to creep up. Union Street, with its quaint shops and cafes, had become the hot street in town. But landlords began pumping up prices and retailers started to flee.

Fillmore was still living in the past — and happy about it, too. Longtime boulevardier Kelly Johnson and his former wife Penelope Lagios had a dance studio at 2226

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*A white elephant of a building — formerly Florence's Variety Store — had been collecting dust for years before it was reborn as Fillamento and helped make Fillmore a desirable street for retailers.*

Fillmore above what is now Athleta. Recently, while soaking up the sunshine and watching the endless parade of passersby on the street, he recalled when the legendary guitarist Carlos Santana had his rehearsal studio next door to the Clay Theatre.

Former Fillmoreans still talk about the promenade of the past with a mixture of sentiment and disbelief. Michael Lerner, a San Francisco television producer-turned-Internet pioneer, remembers that he moved into a \$150 a month one-bedroom apartment in the six-story

building at Sacramento and Fillmore overlooking Sugar's Broiler on September 6, 1974. "There were five or six vegetable stands and small open-front grocers on Fillmore and lots of empty stores everywhere," he says. "The most upscale business on Fillmore was a Baskin-Robbins ice cream parlor," which is now Eileen Fisher, next door to La Mediterranea.

"We used to look in the windows of The Asia Cafe — with its perfectly preserved Art Deco interior that had been abandoned for years — and ask, 'Wouldn't it be cool

to open a great restaurant there?'" Lerner says. "But we couldn't afford it — and besides, that block between California and Pine was off limits in those days. The street was derelict."

Not everyone saw it that way. George Couch, who owns a long list of prime Fillmore Street retail properties today, plunged into San Francisco real estate in the late 1950s, buying houses. But his eye was on Fillmore when even the canniest real estate investors saw it as a dangerous eyesore. "We felt it was a coming street and started buying properties," he says.

And Couch wasn't the only investor playing the property cycles back when the street was reeling from the psychic destruction of the wreckers' ball that had leveled blocks of Victorians on both sides of lower Fillmore in the name of urban renewal. Joe Politz sold his ice cream store at Geary and 18th and took over D&M Liquors in 1963 on the northeast corner of Sacramento and Fillmore. He bought the business for \$25,000, which consisted mainly of inventory and the far more valuable customer list.

Politz didn't start off as a landlord. He was a rent-paying shopkeeper shelling out \$1,000 a month along with his neighbors across the street: the Hillcrest bar and restaurant and a branch of the Bank of America. Up the block was Hy Vitcoff's Fine Furniture Co. and Mohr's Radio Service.

Back then, the budding liquor merchant had no grand vision of Fillmore blooming into a boulevard of smart stores and hip eateries. He just wanted some skin in the game. When he was 27, he recalls, he bought the building he was renting from its three owners: "Mr. McCann, the money man, Sam Kovitz and Ben Davidson, who was his cop on the beat."

The price? "I've never disclosed it," he says. "But I hocked everything I owned in my life — my house, my car — and I was still short. I managed to borrow \$50,000 to finish the deal." He scrounged to buy the building heeding a fundamental of real estate investing: location, location, location. The 1-California bus to and from downtown ran

TO PAGE 10 ►

My life here

Margaret Handelman, resident since 2011

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# Then Rents on Fillmore Started to Creep Up

► FROM PAGE 9

right past this store and connected with the 22-Fillmore line; there are bus stops on two of the four corners. "People coming home from work would get off the bus and stop in for a bottle," Politz says.

His son Mike Politz, now 50, has some great — and not so great — memories of the Fillmore. His dad put him to work in the store at age 11 but gave him pocket change to buy a sandwich for lunch at the Full Belly Deli, where La Mediterraneo stands today. Or to buy a flower for his mom next door at Kyo's Florist run by Kyo Zolyem, which now houses the Yoppi frozen yogurt shop.

"I'd get my hair cut at Foster's Barber Shop a few doors south where the In Water florist is now located," he says. "We used to call him Fosteroo because he was this cool, gay, black Frenchman."

As the years went by, so did the ups and downs on the street. "It wasn't all pretty back then — during some tough times, we had to cut our staff from 13 to five and my wife and I worked six to seven days a week at the store," Politz says. "Still, I love Fillmore and its history. I see people walking down the street with their kids or grandkids and saying, 'I celebrated my graduation at that restaurant or had a birthday dinner at that Japanese restaurant, Ten-Ichi.' I know there has to be change, but all this money coming into the neighborhood and the destruction of its roots . . ." His voice trails off.

When young Mike Politz was sweeping floors and



*"We felt it was a coming street and started buying properties," says landlord George Couch, who now owns a long list of prime Fillmore addresses.*

chilling cases of Dom Perignon for well-heeled customers, his father Joe was scouring the street for deals. He was still renting D&M when he bought the building on the other end of the block at Clay and Fillmore that now houses Palmer's Tavern downstairs. "I bought that building to hedge my bet in case my D&M lease wasn't renewed," he says. The building next door that came as part of the deal was a dilapidated, condemned Victorian that was home to squatters.

His first roll of the dice panned out as a smart investment. Says Politz: "Pacific Medical Center wanted to put an HMO upstairs and they lent the money — \$360,000

through Wells Fargo in 1972 — to buy the building and gave me a 15-year lease to boot." Downstairs, Mohr's Radio Service, which was paying a bargain \$450 a month rent that didn't cover Politz' mortgage, evolved into Cal Hi Fi, then became a slew of restaurants; the first was a steakhouse named Don't Call It Frisco.

These days, Politz looks back wistfully on the deals that got away. "Through the years, I tried to buy every piece of property on Fillmore I could, but I didn't have enough money. The average building was \$125,000, which was still a lot of money then."

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## A Seed of Faith Planted at the Donut Hole

He also didn't have a broker. Politz wheeled and dealed on his own, with sheer guts as his calling card. He remembers wanting to buy the building diagonally across from D&M owned by Kwong Dong when it was leased to two Italian brothers who operated a grocery store. It had a basement, and Politz had plans to tear down the structure and build some shops and a parking lot. "Dong wouldn't sell," he says. "Instead, he opened Sugar's Broiler to give his son a job, and he and his wife ended up having to work the place. Sugar's only opened when Dong was in the mood."

Politz was in the mood to buy the Hillcrest on the northwest corner of the intersection and the apartment building on top of it. But again, he was short of cash. "They wanted a minimum of 10 grand down and I only had five grand at the time. I said to the realtor, Fred Ard, 'Why don't we become partners?' Ard went around me, put the 10 down and bought the whole thing. I was so mad. Look, I'm Italian and I stood on the sidewalk and gave the building the Italian curse, the Malocchio — the evil eye — and a week later, the main water pipe on the top floor broke and flooded all the apartments."

Politz's luck turned positive when he acquired Sullivan's Liquors on lower Fillmore for \$25,000. "Again, I just bought the trade name and the names, addresses and phone numbers of all the customer accounts — plus their delivery service, which was about five cars," he says. "Everybody told me I was crazy, but delivery was big business in those days. I had three separate phone numbers for delivery orders: D&M Liquors, Sullivan Liquors and even Mohr's Liquors — all coming into D&M. Then the phone company got wise to us."

Politz is now writing his memoirs as a merchant, an investor and a family man. He says his favorite deal over the years is virtually unknown. "The building that houses the eye institute next to the Bank of America was the horse stable and carriage garage around 1900 for all the Pacific Heights folks at a time when only a few lucky ones had cars," he says. "The building had a basement — some 10,000 square feet — and I used it as a warehouse and storage for D&M. I tried to buy it — and couldn't — but I got a 15-year lease on the space. My rent was \$200 a month."

**A**UNT BEEBEE — Bertha — and I were no kin at all. She was "that nice old colored woman" who worked at the Donut Hole. Her niece, Bettye, called her Aunt Beebee. It caught on with us regulars. The joint must have served 500 cups of joe a day and a couple of thousand donuts. But for all of us in-and-outers, only a few of us knew her secret name.

Bettye was 300 pounds of a scorching-tongued negress who worked graveyard. There was no need for a bouncer at the Donut Hole on her shift. Besides,

in the back room the bakers, Buck and Chuck, packed some serious heat.

We came bleary-eyed and loud after the clubs closed. It was sugar time. Sugar and caffeine not so discreetly spiked with Korbel brandy. Bettye fussed over us like we were her own children, as if we were the little crosses, cable cars and bridges on her charm bracelet.

Aunt Beebee came on at 6, and after her soon followed the morning people. The

newspaper readers and the cigarette smokers and the shift-changers throughout the city. Aunt Beebee wasn't a small woman either, but she was a willow next to Bettye. I've seen love before; I've seen deception and bloody skulls on sidewalks — but I never saw a love like this one between the two of them. They even fussed at each other with love.

"Where's the napkins at?"

"Find 'em your own self, I'm outta here, old lady!"

"Who you calling old lady, Miss Fat Ass! You coming for Earl's gumbo tonight?"

"I made a sweet potato pie. What time?"

On one of those long weekend holidays, it was about 4 in the afternoon, there was nobody but me and Aunt Beebee in the Donut Hole. She brought over an apple fritter, broke it in half and we sat there together twisting off nibbles and licking the sugar off our fingers.

"Know what I believe?" Beebee more said than asked. "I b'lieve like the Jehovah Witness people, you got to call God by his right name or he can't hear a word you're saying. I've tried. I even sent a \$5 seed of faith to Reverend Ike. It's been two weeks now and I ain't seen a god damned nickel."

Outside, old Mr. Jesse had just put his '62 Impala in park and turned off the key. The old junker chug-a-chugged until it died. Now we were three people picking at an apple fritter and licking our fingers.

"Mr. Jesse," I asked, "if the Lord needed \$20 would you give it him?"

"Hell's bells, if the Lord needed 20 I'd give him 40, no questions asked."

"He needs it, Mr. Jesse. Put the money in my hand and He will show you not one, but three miracles, three blessings in real time. Someone has planted a seed of faith and you have been chosen to raise that seed up and bring it to blossom!"

Mr. Jesse suffered over that. He squinched up his eyes and made a funny mouth. He scratched his nappy hair. He wiped the crumbs of sugar on his pants. Then he reached into his pocket and gave me \$40. I wadded the bills up into a little ball and held it to Aunt Beebee's open hand. "Jehovah God!" she shouted, "Thank you, Jesus! Hallelujah!"

Mr. Jesse shook his head. "You never know. You just never know how you might be a part of the mysterious workin's of the Lord."



A donut shop held down the corner of Fillmore and California for years — first the Donut Hole, then the Rolling Pin.



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Newlyweds POUCHON VENERIN AND WINSOME DELANEY went to the same high school, but at different times. They played in the same bands, although under different directors. They met again more than 15 years ago, in a theatre troupe, when both lived in Florida.



CATHLEEN DALY, a Eureka native who has been a neighborhood resident since the '70s, owns two buildings on Lyon Street. One is a residence with a garden that is her pride and joy; the other is a corner building in which her atelier is located. She is a seasoned artist and art teacher.



EMILY MCCLANAHAN AND MURPHY MACK are avid cyclists who head up SuperPro Racing, a cycling event production company and racing team based in San Francisco.



## Getting to Know the Neighbors

A local photographer's new project helps build a sense of community

BY SHEILA McLAUGHLIN

I HAD a problem: I didn't know where to borrow a cup of sugar.

I'm an artist who has lived in the same flat in the neighborhood for 20 years, but I hardly knew any of my neighbors.

Those who lived above had moved away. Same for those next door, across the street and around the corner. I saw some of the neighbors who remain; I looked into their windows; I parked my car in front of their homes. But to see them isn't to know them.

Camera in hand, I set out to change that. Earlier this year, I began photographing the people in my immediate neighborhood in an attempt to weave together a community through photography. The conceit was simple: I approached people on the street and asked to come into their homes and photograph them.

With surprisingly little hesitation, they've said yes. It turns out that I am not alone: Living in a city surrounded by people is isolating for many. We are crammed up against each other by

concrete, but might as well have rivers and mountains between us.

My project documenting — and attempting to change — this shared experience is called simply "Neighbors."

Our neighborhood has evolved dramatically during the last two decades. Once a predominantly black part of town, the Western Addition has been gentrified and de-gentrified with the Bay Area's dot-com boom and busts. Now it's filled with a racially eclectic mix of young people who can pay high rents, plus people like me who stay because of rent control and a few veteran owners who have lived here since the 1970s.

Since beginning my project in March, I've captured subjects living along Bush, Sutter, Post and nearby streets. Through my lens, I've discovered artists, a juggler, even men prancing about in flamingo outfits. I've documented people and their pets, murals scrawled on rented bedroom walls and an immigrant with a giant American flag draped above her bed.

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VINCE MILLS AND ALEC WAGNER have lived in the neighborhood for nearly 20 years, regularly entertaining at dinner parties and impromptu cocktail fêtes — although these days, they spend half the year in Nice, in the south of France. Vince is ambidextrous, and Alec knows all the lyrics to the *I Love Lucy* theme song.



JIM NEGRI AND DOUGLAS HANSEN moved into the neighborhood in April 2012. Jim has been an accountant, graphic artist and health care analyst, and regularly indulges his loves of film noir and cooking. Doug's passion is costume design and creation. Of particular note: His year-long dedication to creating 34 costumes encompassing all of the *Wizard of Oz* characters.



JULIE AND MARK SWENSON are parents to Joseph, 12, and Caroline, 16. Julie is a native of Cambodia who fled to Thailand to escape the terror she faced in her homeland and was granted entry into the U.S. in the 1980s. Mark drives big rigs.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHEILA MC LAUGHLIN

One couple who had invited President Obama to their wedding posed near the framed letter of the White House's gracious decline.

They are intimate moments both ordinary and extraordinary.

I'm shooting with color film to best capture the full spectrum of our neighborhood. Film demands a careful and slow approach to the picture-making process; it is expensive, increasingly difficult to find and slows everything down — which seems to me a perfect antidote to the hustle-bustle of the city.

The photographs, along with short biographical sketches of the subjects, are posted on a blog and shared with all participants — the first stitches of our new community quilt. Neighbors

post the images to their Facebook accounts. Comments pile up. Social networking is functioning as it was designed: to connect people. An online and offline community is forming simultaneously.

I began this project to express my own sense of isolation, then ended up not only documenting that emotion, but altering it in the process. The estrangement that once gripped me — as I passed by people on the street and neither of us said hello — has waned. It has been replaced by waves of acknowledgment and friendship. My project has spurred dinner parties, lunches, teas, a camping trip and invitations to board game nights among those photographed. A number

of participants are now organizing a neighborhood potluck; the photographs will be projected during the gathering.

Murphy Mack, a bicycle enthusiast who lives around the corner from me with his partner Emily McLanahan, insisted on being photographed on their tandem. He had this to say about the project: "Emily and I have been together in this house for seven years. We know a few of our neighbors by name, and many more by sight only. This photo expose is a great way to learn more about our neighbors and to build community in the neighborhood."

Another subject, Alec Wagner, who lives nearby with his partner Vince Mills, says: "Vince and I are especially

keen on the 'Neighbors' project, as the heart of the effort lies in connecting neighbors to form a community — something we've always tried to do during our 20-something years in the neighborhood. Beyond that, the project is a fascinating blend of social media, old-school photography and historical documentation. We imagine that, before too long, other subjects of the project will gather to share stories, get better acquainted and form a well-connected dynamic community in our neck of the woods."

You can see more of the "Neighbors" project at [sfwesternaddition.tumblr.com](http://sfwesternaddition.tumblr.com). If you're interested in participating, I'd love to meet you and discuss it over a cup of tea. I can bring the sugar.

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2720 Lyon St	2	3.5	2		19	10/2/2013	3,200,000	3,854,000
3020 Laguna St	5	4.5	2		27	9/30/2013	4,495,000	4,400,000
2201 Lyon St	6	3.5	4	3468	12	9/27/2013	3,895,000	5,250,000
2759 Broderick St	5	4.5	3		0	9/20/2013	6,000,000	6,000,000
2700 Pierce St	5	4.75	2	6981	46	9/30/2013	8,500,000	8,890,000

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1551 Filbert St #2	1	1	1		10	9/24/2013	699,000	725,000
1700 Gough St #503	1	2	1	791	26	10/4/2013	600,000	730,000
1755 Filbert St #1R	1	1	1	1259	63	9/30/2013	839,000	800,000
1990 Green St #107	1	1	0		13	9/19/2013	785,000	800,000
2800 California St #301	2	2	1		33	10/4/2013	859,000	890,000
2727 Sutter St	3	2	1	1556	39	9/19/2013	899,000	910,000
1945 Washington St #203	2	2			16	10/9/2013	865,000	915,000
2729 Sutter St	3	2	1	1594	115	9/27/2013	969,000	990,000
2244 Greenwich St	2	2	1	1398	76	9/18/2013	1,150,000	1,050,000
1800 Washington St #913	2	1	1	1109	17	10/7/2013	1,095,000	1,180,000
2421 Buchanan St #B	2	2	0	1738	42	9/24/2013	1,295,000	1,261,000
3128 Washington St	3	2	1		154	10/4/2013	1,295,000	1,270,000
1832 Broderick St	3	2	1	1653	24	10/10/2013	1,150,000	1,285,000
122 Arguello Blvd	3	2	1	1690	27	10/3/2013	1,399,000	1,500,000
2090 Pacific Ave #301	2	2	1	1850	7	9/27/2013	1,249,000	1,500,000
2200 Sacramento St #1206	2	2	1		16	9/25/2013	1,395,000	1,625,000
3294 Clay St #6	3	2	1	2006	9	9/25/2013	1,550,000	1,685,000
1870 Jackson St #702	3	2.5	1		10	10/11/2013	1,550,000	1,700,000
333 Spruce St	3	2.5	1	1849	73	10/2/2013	1,635,000	1,708,000
312 Locust St	3	2	1	1889	26	10/10/2013	1,839,000	1,860,000
2668 Greenwich St	3	2	1	2435	14	9/27/2013	2,250,000	2,500,000
1925 Gough St #41	4	3.5	1	3808	112	9/17/2013	2,695,000	2,695,000
1980 Vallejo St #2	4	3	1		14	10/8/2013	2,700,000	2,725,000
1980 Vallejo St #5	3	3	1		153	10/10/2013	2,945,000	2,850,000
102 Walnut St	4	3	1	3617	182	9/27/2013	3,200,000	3,000,000

### A sharper image, with top technology



Have you ever imagined what technology and gadgetry the founder of The Sharper Image would include in his own home? Richard Thalheimer's classic Mediterranean home at 2330 Lyon Street (left) is now listed at just under \$12 million — reduced from the \$15 million he was asking two years ago.

"I used to work in the city and use it for entertaining. Now I live in Marin and I just don't use it," Thalheimer told *The Wall Street Journal*. "I want

to find a smaller place in the city for when we go to the ballet."

Designer Holly Hulburg's innovative use of space, materials and light have taken this interior into a new realm of sophisticated living. With bay views and a picturesque setting overlooking the Presidio and the Lyon Street steps, this home is a technological masterpiece wired for every imaginable configuration of entertainment, security and light. It comes complete with a spa, pool, jacuzzi and garage parking for at least five cars, plus a wine room and his-and-hers master suites.

October found the market still going strong with more buyers than inventory. The seasonal activity for fourth quarter is consistent with historical data and the market values continue to trend upward. Low inventory coupled with rising interest rates present obstacles for loan-dependent buyers. The sky-high rents are pushing buyers to buy and sellers to hold, which indicates a long-term upward pricing trend.

— Data and commentary provided by MARIA MARCHETTI at Sotheby's International Realty. Contact her at maria@mariamarchetti.com or call 415/699-8008.



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# Finding a House – and a Home

A memoir of the neighborhood

BY ROBERT SPEER

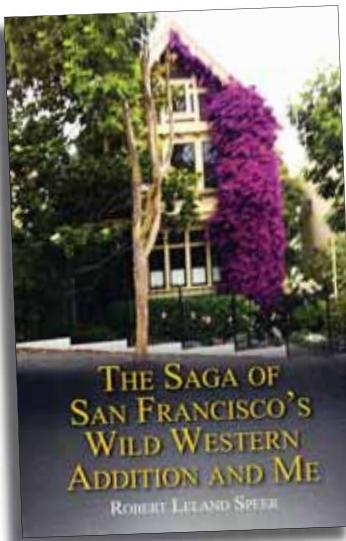
**A**FTER STAYING IN San Francisco briefly with a Chinese American friend from medical school and his aristocratic Xian/Shanghai family, I scouted around for an apartment. Mostly I found the rental areas bland and uninteresting. But I quickly discovered I particularly liked the Fillmore District, with its dynamic colorful appeal and affordability.

I lived first [in 1969] on the north side of California Street, between Steiner and Fillmore Streets, in one of the Stick Eastlake-style row houses, circa

**■ EXCERPT** 1880s. The five connected row houses each consisted of a pair of Victorian flats, with servant quarters above and below the two owners' flats interconnected with the corresponding flat. The eight-room top flat had been split in half, and my apartment in the rear had a view of the large, combined backyards.

To pay for my expenses and generate extra income, I worked as a shop apprentice at Kotzbeck's picture framing shop on Fillmore Street. The German-American shopkeeper, Gus Drautz, owned an extensive and valuable print collection, which I helped catalog. This enjoyable extension of my art history master's degree was an extra bonus.

Gus was a master craftsman and considered the best picture framer in the city. He had a large workshop employing six men [at 2033 Fillmore]. Bank of America



was one of his clients, and he framed large photographs of their officers for the branch offices. Also, he produced exquisitely framed original fine prints for the rooms at the Clift Hotel.

One day while I was clerking in front, a withered, tiny old lady, dressed in an ancient black lace hat and a long black dress touching her black shoes, came into the shop followed by her tall, handsome, young male chauffeur in full livery uniform, which included a black cap and black-laced calf-length boots. Her late-1930s black Packard town car was prominently parked in front. She showed me a metal-framed photograph with a broken face glass. I took it to Gus in the back workshop, and he had the glass immediately

replaced after he saw the order was from Mrs. Cahill.

I asked him, "What shall I charge?" He said, "No charge." Later I asked why there was no charge. He said that she was the wealthy matriarch of the locally influential Cahill Construction Co., established in 1912. He further said, "I try to keep the carriage trade happy, and I am certainly not the only one." He went on to explain, "Many of the (nearby Pacific Heights) extremely wealthy socialites, noted for their stinginess, would go to the prestigious I. Magnin clothing store and return haute couture gowns after the symphony and opera openings, as 'not being quite my personal style.'"

Another time at the counter, I received a call asking, "Is Gus in?" I said, "Whom should I say is calling?" The throaty voice at the end of the line said, "Tell him Sally called." When Gus returned, I told him who had called and he was thrilled. He asked me, after talking with her, whether I would like to accompany him to hang some graphics in her home. I said, "Would I ever!"

Ms. Stanford, who appropriated the name of the university, was one of the most famous madams in San Francisco history. Her magnificent four-story Classic Revival-style brick home, circa 1905, at 2324 Pacific Avenue had been built for the president of Southern Pacific Railroad. I was later briefly her neighbor. She possessed a witty and charming personality and a large full figure that filled out her tight dress. When I met her, I remembered she was famously quoted as saying, "They (her male patrons) were a wonderful set of burglars. If they were stealing, they were doing it with class and style." San Francisco had been noted as a wild and frisky town since the Gold Rush days of 1849.

Her home was decorated in a late 1890s bordello style, with red-flocked wallpapered parlors. But the thing that I remember most was the open, huge, eight-square foot walk-in silver vault in her kitchen she casually showed me.

*Excerpted from The Saga of San Francisco's Wild Western Addition and Me © 2013 by local real estate agent Robert Leland Speer, available at Books Inc. in Laurel Village.*



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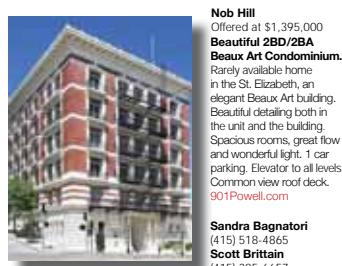
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