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— A LONGTIME CITRINE CLIENT

## LOCALS

# It's a Salon — and a Fashion Boutique, Too

'It's like family,' says Citrine's circle of admirers

BY FRAN  
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ONE OF THE neighborhood's hidden fashion gems is tucked away behind the sidewalk shrubbery at 1724 Fillmore — in the warmly haphazard space inside the Citrine salon.

While hair styling remains its primary business, the constantly changing displays of jewelry, clothing and accessories curated by owner Renee Cohen have attracted a following of their own. Cohen has a passion and a sharp eye for unique fashion. She satisfies it with regular trips to the apparel show in San Mateo in search of bags, scarves, jackets, jewels and other fashion finds.

Cohen came to Fillmore Street nearly 20 years ago, opening Citrine in the block between Sutter and Post after working as a stylist at several Union Square salons. She was soon joined by her old friend and fellow stylist Bill Kesel, who shared the Citrine space until his death last October. Mel Campbell, also a specialist in coloring, has been a member of the Citrine group since 2000. They are joined by cos-



metologist Lamis Malouf, who takes care of facials, waxing and manicures — and whose daughter Natalie serves as Citrine's general assistant between classes at City College.

"It's like family," says one longtime Citrine client. "I have to drop in regularly to catch up on everything. And the whole family still mourns Bill's death." Cohen is currently searching for a new stylist, who will have large shoes to fill but a good family to join.

Over the past two decades, the block now sandwiched between old Fillmore and gentrifying Fillmore has seen both signifi-

cant change and a few things — Citrine included — that have stayed the same. The recently renovated Goodwill store moved from one corner of Fillmore and Post to another right across the street, making space for authentic South Indian restaurant Dosa. On Citrine’s side of the street are longtime neighbor Extreme Pizza, Haight Street Eyecare — which has been from 1752 Fillmore to the Haight and back over the years — and relative newcomer Royal Indian Cuisine.



Bill Kesel worked at Citrine for many years. Mel Campbell (left) has been at the salon since 2000.

The loss of their neighbor, the beloved Fillmore fixture Marcus Books, hit the Citrine staffers particularly hard. The oldest black bookstore in the country, family-owned Marcus Books was evicted in May 2014. Founder and co-owner Raye Richardson had lived upstairs in the Victorian then painted bright purple with her daughter and son-in-law, co-owners Karen and Greg Johnson, since 1981. Granddaughter Gina Raye Johnson, who liked to dance around and chat with customers, was a frequent presence at Citrine from the time she was a toddler. “We all miss having her around,” Cohen says. The building is now painted white, and its commercial space, occupied for a time by a spa after Marcus Books closed, now houses the Hue hair salon.

Cohen grew up in Los Angeles, and got into the hair styling business at age

15. “We had a ‘Four-Four’ plan when I was in high school, where you worked four hours and had classes for four hours,” she says. “By the end of it, they thought I was the instructor.” She quit the program, but ultimately finished school and wound up in the business. Not long after moving to San Francisco, she went into business with partner Carol DeAlba.

“A lot of my clients weren’t wearing earrings, and they looked better with earrings,” she says. So she started visiting the Gift Center and buying earrings to sell. But DeAlba ultimately wasn’t interested in the earring business, and eventually moved back to her Chicago home.

One day in 1968, while dressed in her favorite Nehru outfit, Cohen met a young hair stylist with a six-inch handlebar mustache, dressed in lederhosen. “We looked like we were in costume,” she recalls. It was the beginning of a long friendship with Bill Kesel, and the two often donned zany outfits to liven up their collaboration. A collegial spirit shines on holidays and during special events like the annual Fillmore Jazz Festival, when Citrine staffers can be found holding forth with indoor-outdoor sales — and a bottle of prosecco next to the cheese and crackers in the back.

From earring sales it was an easy slide into fashion and accessories. “The most fun is putting things together — earrings and clothing to go with them, silk one-of-a-kind jackets and scarves to compliment the outfits,” Cohen says.

“I love going to Citrine because not only do I get a great cut, but we have lively conversations about lots of things,” says decades-long client Lois Peacock.

Like many others who come in for a haircut, Peacock often walks out with a new fashion accessory. Or two.



Renee Cohen opened Citrine at 1724 Fillmore, between Sutter and Bush, nearly 20 years ago.