

Developer aims high: 25 stories

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How California cuisine started

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Buy a bike, help a kid

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New FILLMORE

SAN FRANCISCO ■ JUNE 2007

Big Shifts on Dining Scene



- Cassis opens
- Chez Nous closes
- Slanted Door and A-16 coming soon
- Florio gets new chef
- Fillmore Grill dark

MAJOR CHANGES are coming to the Fillmore dining scene.

Already a new French restaurant, Cassis — offering authentic Nicoise cuisine — has opened at Sutter and Steiner in the space most recently occupied by Winterland.

Fillmore hot spot Chez Nous — which launched the trend toward small plates in the city — will close June 3. But its passing is sweet sorrow, announced, as it was, with the news that the team behind A-16 in the Marina will bring a new Roman osteria to the space at 1911 Fillmore this summer.

Just around the corner, at 2226 Bush Street, construction is continuing on a neighborhood outpost of the Slanted Door, the wildly popular Vietnamese restaurant at the Ferry Building. Chef-owner Charles Phan is putting down roots on Bush Street, opening a restaurant downstairs and building a new loft for his family upstairs.

Change is also coming to two longtime Fillmore restaurants. Florio has a new chef who is bringing new items, and some old favorites, to the menu — and a potential suitor who would bring an entirely new concept to the clubby bistro. Fillmore Grill has closed, with promises to re-emerge after a facelift. But construction has halted and the timetable for reopening is uncertain.

Restaurant Cassis opened quietly on May 15.

“Well, we tried to open quietly,” chuckles manager Jerome Meloni, who was “quite surprised” by the number of eager neighbors who showed up the first few nights Cassis was open.

The restaurant is a partnership between Jerome Meloni, who oversees the dining room, and his brother Stephane Meloni, who is the chef.

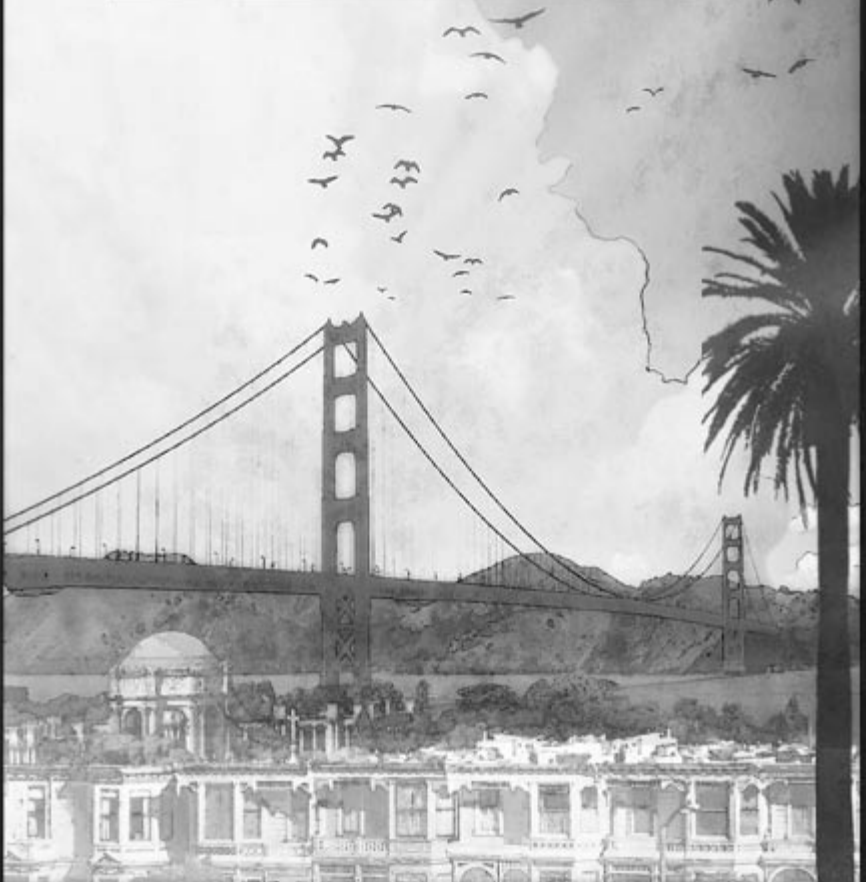
Photograph by MINA PAHLEVAN / 12studios.com

Jerome Meloni (above) and his brother Stephane have opened Cassis on the challenging corner of Sutter and Steiner.

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This Month

IN & OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD



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Jewish Community Center

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S.F. Museum & Historical Society

More info: www.sfhistorical.org

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The Mindful Body

2876 California Street

More info: 931-2639



CHINESE MEDICINE FOR DOGS & CATS

Workshop with Dr. Cheryl Schwartz (above)

Saturday, June 16, 9:30 to 4

Pets Unlimited, 2343 Fillmore Street

More info: 568-3081

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TWO SCHOOLS located in the same Western Addition building have received the California Distinguished School Award.

The schools are Gateway High School and KIPP Middle School, both at 1430 Scott Street at Geary.

Only 76 middle schools and 95 high schools in the state received the award, about 7 percent of California's 2,400 middle and high schools. Gateway and KIPP were the only schools in San Francisco to be honored.

Gateway is a public charter high school. KIPP San Francisco Bay Academy is an innovative fifth through eighth grade public

Local Schools Honored

Gateway, KIPP only two in city to get award

school that prepares students for the best high schools and colleges.

"These middle and high schools are truly extraordinary places with devoted teachers, dedicated staff and motivated principals," said state schools superintendent Jack O'Connell.

Gateway's principal, Sharon Oiken,

credited the hard work of the students, teachers and the community and said she was "proud of the teaching and learning that takes place at Gateway every day."

KIPP's principal, Lydia Glassie, reacted similarly, adding that high expectations at the school help students reach academic heights.

Gateway's mission is to provide a high-quality college preparatory education to a wide range of learners. Gateway's students come from more than 100 middle schools. More than one third will be the first in their families to attend college. Last year, 95 percent of Gateway's graduates went to college.

The nine-year-old school serves a racially diverse student body, approximately 25 percent of whom have learning differences — more than double the ratio in the average San Francisco public high school.

KIPP stands for the Knowledge Is Power Program. It strives to couple rigorous academics with character development.

25-Story Tower of Condos Proposed

By DON LANGLEY

YET ANOTHER new high-rise residential tower — this one almost twice the permitted height — is being proposed in the neighborhood. The tower, part of a project to be built next year at Pine and Franklin Streets, would be 240 feet, or 25 stories, tall.

A second tower on the site would be at the 130-foot height limit. The two towers would be connected by a seven-story, 65-foot high structure.

Even if it is built within the height limit, the taller tower will block some views from the San Francisco Towers, the complex of life care residences for seniors across Pine Street. For that reason, taller, slender towers with some view between them are better than a lower but bulkier building, according to John Robertson, president of AF Evans, the developer.

In the proposed plan, the taller tower would be on the Franklin Street side. It would be set back from Pine Street to make space for a landscaped mini-park and water feature open to the public. Retail outlets would occupy the ground floor of the buildings.

The units — 282 in one plan, 265 in another — would likely be condominiums, mostly with one or two bedrooms, some with terraces and balconies to soften the exterior appearance.

The alternative to the two towers would



The proposed project at Pine and Franklin Streets would consist of two residential towers above a base of shops and offices.

be a 130-foot slab, similar to the Holiday Inn nearby on Van Ness, Robertson said. He said he is "trying to avoid a big wall on Pine Street" that a massive structure facing the Towers would create.

One Towers resident argued with that assessment.

"I see the appearance from Pine Street as being tall with fat towers," he said. "Any slimmness would be in one tower as viewed from Franklin Street, plus a narrow slot between the towers. He should give thought to setting each tower back from a pedestal and tapering them, as indicated in the Van Ness corridor plan."

Robertson presented his plans at the May meeting of the directors of the Pacific Heights Residents Association. One director, Paul Wermer, protested that instead of focusing on one building at a time, it would be wise to take a broader view of what should transpire along Van Ness Avenue.

A four-member committee of San

Francisco Towers residents has been meeting with AF Evans, the project's developer. Ralph Romberg, a committee member, said the sessions have been "fairly friendly" so far. Residents are happy to be getting rid of the rundown buildings now on the site, Romberg said, but are worried about traffic and the density of the project.

Some Towers residents are also concerned that the proposed mini-park will exacerbate the area's homeless problem. Romberg said the church at Sacramento and Van Ness operates a shelter and that the overflow spreads through the area.

Representatives from San Francisco Architectural Heritage, a group dedicated to preserving significant buildings in the city, noted that the project would require demolition of five buildings that contribute to the "auto-themed historic district" on Van Ness between the Civic Center and Jackson Street.

Heritage urges that the existing struc-

tures be retained for entry and retail space, and that the towers be located toward Van Ness rather than Franklin, "where their height would be incompatible with the low-rise residential character of the area."

John Milford, director of the Towers, took an expansive view: "We are not anti-development. In fact, anything new on that space will be an improvement, in my opinion."

But the Towers residents council has hired attorney Sue Hestor to contest aspects of the project. In a letter to the planning commission, Hestor argued that because of its height and density, the condo project is not compatible with the neighborhood or the residential areas to the west.

She also asked for an alternative proposal that "gives something back to the street and to the surrounding residences."

"Better design would be the first step," she said. "Greatly reduced heights the second."

Benefit District in Japantown Delayed

Formation of a community benefit district in Japantown to promote cleanliness, security and cultural preservation has been postponed for a year.

A group of property owners has been meeting for six months to consider the formation of such a district and came up with a preliminary plan. Feedback was "encouraging," according to Robert Hamaguchi, executive director of the Japantown Task Force. But more community-wide education and some changes in the plan are necessary, he said.

Plan to Develop Presidio Hospital Scaled Back

YOU CAN'T fight City Hall, they say, but the Richmond Presidio Neighbors group has proved that, working with City Hall, it is possible to fight the federal government's Presidio Trust — and win.

After years of wrangling over the use of the long-closed Public Health Service Hospital off Lake Street at 14th Avenue, neighbors succeeded in reducing the number of housing units to be built there, in turn reducing the flow of commuters across their neighborhood and others nearby.

The agreement calls for the destruction of two wings added to the front of the building in the 1950s.

The hospital closed in 1980. It and its surrounding buildings have been largely

vacant since the hospital closed its doors.

Claudia Lewis, president of the Richmond Presidio Neighbors, credited Mayor Gavin Newsom and his aide, Kyri McClellan, and Supervisors Jake McGoldrick and Michela Alioto-Pier for "their steadfast support throughout the process." She said Dan Bernal of Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office attended the fall workshop process and helped encourage the compromise.

The original "preferred alternative" for Forest City, the developer selected by the Presidio Trust, was for 350 units. The final agreement called for only 186 units, with fewer studios and one-bedroom units and more units with two or more bedrooms, fulfilling the Presidio Trust's need for revenue and the city's desire for more housing

of sufficient size to accommodate families.

According to Lewis, the turning point came last June, when more than 300 people from the neighborhood attended a Presidio Trust hearing and voiced opposition to the plan to renovate the full 400,000 square feet of available space in the hospital and its outbuildings. That was followed by "a great deal of written commentary," Lewis said.

The Trust changed course and in November held four public workshops with representatives from the neighborhood, environmentalists, historic preservationists and others.

To mitigate the increased traffic the development will bring, the plan calls for an entrance to the site via 14th Avenue and exit on 15th Avenue.

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Questions? Contact Sharlene Simon at 415.756.9868 (ssimon@ymcasf.org) or Sophia Turnipseed at 415.292.2008.



■ CRIME WATCH

Firearms and Drugs

Geary Boulevard and Van Ness Avenue

April 7, 8:27 p.m.

A man walked into a bar at Geary and Van Ness and ordered a beer. As he placed his shirt on the bar, a woman sitting nearby heard a loud thump. Soon afterward, the man started bragging that he had a gun. The witness left and called the police.

Three officers arrived to investigate. One officer confronted the suspect and secured a pistol. During a search, officers discovered baggies of marijuana in both of the man's pockets. He was booked at Northern Station.

Burglary

Fillmore and Sacramento Streets

April 10, 10:19 a.m.

Officers on their way to the scene of a car burglary passed a juvenile they had arrested for a number of auto burglaries over the last three years. The young man matched the description of the person suspected of the burglary.

When the suspect saw the patrol car turning around, he sped off on foot. Officers followed in their patrol car. As the suspect ran up Wilmot Alley, he dropped a laptop computer.

Officers arrested him, and witnesses confirmed he was the same person they had witnessed breaking into the vehicle.

Robbery

Sutter and Buchanan Streets

April 20, 8:15 p.m.

The street crimes unit observed a man approaching parked cars and peering into them, so they followed him. The man approached a pedestrian and asked him for a dollar. After the pedestrian complied, the suspect began to follow him, shouting abusively and demanding more money. The pedestrian turned and opened his wallet to show the suspect that he had no more money, but the suspect continued to follow him, shouting. The pedestrian then attempted to flee, but the suspect grabbed his arm, still demanding cash.

At this point, the officers stepped in. The pedestrian confirmed that he had been afraid of the suspect, and believed he had had no choice but to part with his money. The officers arrested the suspect and booked him at Northern Station.

Assault

Van Ness Avenue and Eddy Street

April 23, 4:30 p.m.

A woman waiting to get a prescription filled at Walgreens became irate when the pharmacist could not serve her at once because so many people were in line ahead of her. When the woman flew into a rage and began shouting profanities, the pharmacist refused to fill her prescription and asked

her to leave the store. The woman then took a bottle of vitamins from the shelf and hurled it at the pharmacist, striking him on the head. Another employee overheard the disturbance and intervened. The woman attacked this employee as well, scratching him and biting him. Several onlookers called the police.

Officers detained the woman and arrested her for assault with intent to do harm. She was booked at Northern Station.

Burglary

Sacramento and Franklin Streets

April 27, 8:01 a.m.

When officers arrived at the scene of a burglary in progress, witnesses directed them to a man who was fleeing down Clay Street. Officers set out after him and detained him. The witnesses told the officers they had observed the man as he entered the building in which they work. They did not recognize him, and believed his behavior was suspicious: He entered the building with nothing in his hands, and left carrying three bags.

A search revealed that the man had with him a flashlight, a screwdriver and gloves — items commonly used in burglaries. He was also carrying narcotics paraphernalia. The burglary suspect was booked at Northern Station.

Burglary

Fillmore and Eddy Streets

May 5, 6:42 p.m.

A woman who had just returned from the hospital was resting at home in bed. Her son, with whom she had just had a heated argument, arrived at the door of her apartment building. Fearing for her safety, she refused to let him in. Her son became enraged and kicked in the front door, then came to the door of her apartment and started demanding money. The woman called the police.

When the officers arrived, the son was still on the premises, hurling items about in the building's entryway. The woman asked the officers to arrest him. Officers arranged a protective order for her and scheduled a visit from Adult Protective Services. The son was booked at Northern Station.

Robbery

Fillmore and O'Farrell Streets

May 10, 7:43 a.m.

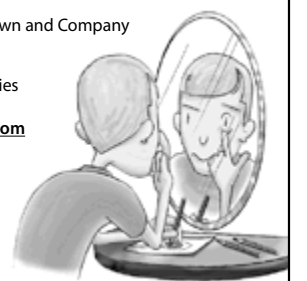
A woman suffered a stab wound during a scuffle during which she was robbed of her purse. Several bystanders witnessed the incident and called the police. One officer saw the suspect still loitering in the area and gave chase. The officer who cornered the man in a garage found that the suspect had a knife and the victim's purse in his possession. The suspect was arrested and booked at Northern Station.

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Neighborhood Spots Among the Best of San Francisco

AN ANNUAL feature in the *SF Weekly*, one of the city’s alternative weekly newspapers, purports to identify the Best of San Francisco. This year’s edition, published May 16, included quite a few neighborhood attractions.

Best Bikini Line Rip
BeneFit, 2117 Fillmore

While acknowledging that, as a general rule, bikini waxing “feels like a session in an especially cruel torture chamber,” the *Weekly* allows that the waxers at BeneFit on Fillmore “truly have a gift for a quick and relatively painless bikini line (or eyebrow) rip.” And if it were done, it were well it were done quickly.

Kudos were also given to the shop’s line of products, which are tested only on humans and not on animals.

Best Make-up Store
M.A.C., 2011 Fillmore

After warning women shoppers that they will need to “get over the disconcerting fact that many of the boys working there are prettier and more polished than you,” the *Weekly* lauds the quality and selection of products offered for skin and hair and general dolling up purposes, calling it “a terrific place to blow a few hundred bucks.”

One reason the Fillmore location was pegged as the best, though, is that the staffers never put on that condescending “glam attitude that so often comes hand-in-hand” with make-up purveyors — especially pretty and polished ones.

Best Neighborhood Bakery
Patisserie Delanghe, 1890 Fillmore

You feel as if you pack on a few pounds simply reading the recitation of specialties and seasonal treats baked at Delanghe that have tickled the tastebuds of *Weekly* staffers — but the pastry is French, so by definition it won’t make anyone fat.

Customers are especially exhorted to “try the thin almond macaroon topped with a chocolate-glazed turban full of mocha creme.”

What the *Weekly* reviewer probably didn’t know was that owner Dominique Delanghe has known even tonier neighborhoods than ours: Once upon a time he baked treats for the queen’s garden parties at Buckingham Palace.

Best New Neighborhood Restaurant
Nopa, 560 Divisadero

While it’s a bit of a geographic stretch to claim this North of the Panhandle hot spot as one of our own, we can honestly claim a connection with Nopa chef and irrefutable good guy Laurence Jossel from years back when he was the founding chef at Fillmore’s Chez Nous. And Jossel later infused new life into the menu at Harry’s on Fillmore.

In singling out Nopa as the best new neighborhood restaurant, the *Weekly* noted the downside of popularity — that prime-time reservations must be made a month in advance. But it concluded: “Diners lucky enough to score a table enjoy a rustic, organic, Mediterranean wood-fired cuisine, featuring dishes ranging from a

house-ground burger with harissa aioli to a seafood stew with saffron and rouille.”

Best Physical Fitness Guru
David McGuire

There must have been tough competition in picking the city’s best fitness trainer, given the glut, so we’re especially lucky to have the winner in our midst. The *Weekly* notes: “McGuire is always cheerful, even though he gets up at 4 o’clock every morning. But don’t let that put you off. He’s the best fitness instructor around.”

In addition to leading his own outdoor workout programs (www.dmcguirefitness.com), McGuire leads classes at Pacific Heights Health Club at 2356 Pine Street. The *Weekly* notes that McGuire melds a number of disciplines into his workouts, including yoga, Pilates and dance, “so you leave his sessions exhausted but somehow in a Zenlike state.”

Neighborhood souls who have actually trained with McGuire acknowledge that he’s perennially perky, that he’s a great fitness instructor and that they leave his workouts exhausted. But they’re reportedly puzzled by the Zenlike thing.

Best Socialite
Vanessa Getty

While applauding her altruistic nature, the *Weekly* couldn’t resist writing Getty’s name without a few snarky comments about her reputed disdain for the current mayor and such. But it did end with the upbeat observation that “she’s our

very own socialite-cum-model.” And it also cited last year’s appearance in *W Magazine* — either brave or disconcerting, depending on your politics — “sporting curlers while sitting atop her coffee table next to a horse head, gazing off into either the bright future as the queen of San Francisco or into a deep-blue diazepam haze.”

Best Yoga Studio
The Mindful Body, 2876 California

This bestowal of bestness recognizes the power in less being more, noting: “In a city populated with yoga studios of all kinds ... the Mindful Body stands out as a quiet beacon of peace in the midst of an ancient practice that has become a frenzied trend.”

Accolades are given for the studio’s attention to both physical and mental well-being, offering massage, acupuncture, Feldenkrais and other holistic healing methods in addition to yoga. And the *Weekly* claims the Mindful Body boasts “some of San Francisco’s finest instructors” — high praise in the midst of a frenzied trend.

Best in the Readers’ Poll

Several local shops and services were named by the *Weekly*’s readers as the best:

- Best Lingerie Store: My Boudoir, 2029 Fillmore
- Best Massage: Kabuki Springs & Spa, 1750 Geary
- Best Vet: Pets Unlimited, 2343 Fillmore



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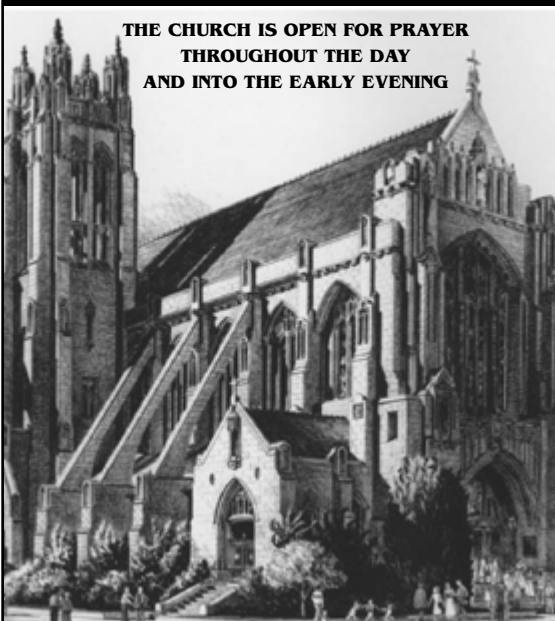
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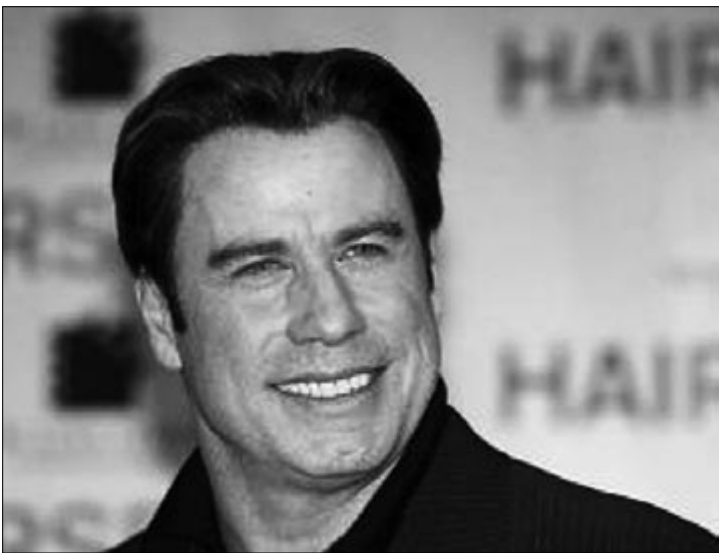
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John Travolta Newest Fan of Fillmore Make-up Artist



Actor John Travolta: “He has great skin.”

By BARBARA KATE REPA

NELLIE MUGANDA, owner of Neja Cosmetics at 1850 Fillmore, has been keeping some high-flying company these days — as personal make-up artist to actor John Travolta.

“The man is aging beautifully. He has great skin,” Muganda says. “And yes, those blue eyes are still incredible, too.”

Travolta first stole hearts in the mid-70s with his role as Vinny in television’s “Welcome Back, Kotter,” then broke hearts as a strutting white-suited dancer in the film *Saturday Night Fever*, and later scared the wits out of viewers with his heartless comeback role as a hit man in *Pulp Fiction*.

This year, the avid pilot has been flying from Los Angeles to New York and back on press junkets promoting his new film, “Wild Hogs.”

And Nellie Muganda has often been right there with him, sprucing up Travolta’s visage before his appearances on “Ellen,” “Regis & Kathy” and “The Tonight Show.” He wanted her help before appearing as a presenter at this year’s Oscar ceremonies, but she was already booked by the founders of the Pixar studio.

Travolta quickly proclaimed Muganda “the best make-up artist in the world” when working with her in February.

“When I think of the number of hands that must have touched that face, I’m humbled,” she says.

“It’s interesting working with celebrities,” says Muganda, who has burnished the faces of dozens of stars, including Tony Bennett, Deepak Chopra, Paul McCartney and Kevin Bacon during her 23 years in the hair and cosmetics business. “Most are distant, because that’s how they protect themselves. The nicer ones, they open up — and want to know about me. That surprises me, that a big movie star would want to know about me.”

As for Travolta, Muganda reports: “What you see is what you get. He is wonderful, a true professional who always shows up on time and always shows respect to those around him.” She says Travolta doesn’t discuss his Scientology connection, unlike some other celebrity converts to the religion.

Travolta will remain in demand — and Muganda presumably in demand along with him — as he promotes the film *Hairspray*, slated for release next month. In it, he plays the role of Edna Turnblad, earlier made iconic by Divine.

Now there’s a tough job for a make-up artist.

99 Cent Store on Post Street Gets a Hearing

THE Redevelopment Agency will hold a hearing June 5 to determine whether a proposed formula retail use — a 99 Cent Only store at 1336 Post Street — complies with the Western Addition redevelopment plan.

Formula retail is the planning term for what are commonly known as chain stores.

The hearing, the first under the agency’s new policy restricting formula retail stores, may put to rest rumors that circulated among members of the Cathedral Hill Neighbors Association in mid-May that a Mollie Stone’s market would take over the former Bell Market site.

Mike Stone, owner of Mollie Stone’s, said his company had never considered the Post Street site and that he had no idea how the rumor started.

The purpose of the June 5 hearing is to determine whether the 99 Cent Only store will promote the redevelopment plan’s purpose of “promoting a satisfying and urbane living and working environment that preserves and enhances the unique social, cultural and esthetic qualities of the city.”

The store has already made brief presentations to the Japantown Task Force and the Western Addition Citizens Advisory Committee.

The 99 Cent Only store is proposing to replace front windows and awning fabric and to add a sign over the vehicle entrance, in addition to some interior modifications.



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Not just a corner market

The Blue Fog Market has opened at the corner of California and Divisadero, with a sleek look and upscale offerings. The space has been outfitted with new cabinetry and shelving and revamped in dark tones that reveal a distressed 100-year-old fir floor. While you might dash in for a box of baking soda, you'll likely leave with some of the tasty treats offered — from organic cereal to glazed figs to sauvignon blanc vinegar. Also available: packaged meals ready to heat and serve, prepared in the kitchen of nearby Ella's restaurant.

Clicking for biscuits

Many neighborhood residents developed an addiction to those buttery biscuits chef Joanna Karlinsky first made available when she owned The Meetinghouse at the site now occupied by the restaurant Quince, then brought to the Elite Cafe on Fillmore during her stint as chef there. Here's good news for the addicted: You can still get the flaky wonders through the wonder of the Internet. Exactly 24 frozen squares cost \$25, with free delivery in San Francisco, at www.meetinghousebiscuits.com.

Cowgirl Creamery turns 10

The artisan cheesemakers who were in the neighborhood at 2413 California Street before opening their bustling Ferry Building location are celebrating their 10th year in business. Owners Sue Conley and Peggy Smith make their cheese in Point Reyes. But you can still get the award-winning Cowgirl Creamery cheeses nearby at Mollie Stone's and Whole Foods — and, for bargain prices, at the friendly little Natural Market on the corner of Pine and Webster.

Cafe Majestic's new team

Cafe Majestic in the historic Hotel Majestic at 1500 Sutter Street faced a rocky start when it reopened late last year after a four-year closure. But the place now boasts a new general manager, Ryan Maxey, and a new executive chef, Ian Begg. Begg, 25, worked with and was inspired by Todd Humphries, of St. Helena's Martini House. He's revamping the menu to offer California-French fare using fresh, organic, seasonal ingredients.

Brothers Offer a Taste of Southern France



Jerome and Stephane Meloni have teamed up to open Cassis.

► FROM PAGE 1

The brothers are natives of Nice, on the French Riviera, and they promise to bring “a taste of the south of France, with Italian flair.”

The menu is decidedly southern French, with such Nicoise specialties as pistou, ratatouille, pissaladiere, roasted red peppers and salade Nicoise. But there are Italian influences as well, including lasagna and risotto, plus four thin-crust pizzas turned out from the wood-burning pizza oven they have installed.

Prices range from \$6 to \$9 for appetizers, \$11 to \$14 for pizzas and \$18 to \$22 for main courses.

“We want to serve a simple kind of food at prices not too high,” says Jerome. “It’s the kind of food I want to eat.”

The dining room will be familiar to those who ate at Winterland, the most recent casualty in a succession of restaurants to come and go at the location. But it has been warmed up considerably, with cassis-colored walls and stone accents. And there are fewer tables than there were before.

“I like to serve people in a certain way,” Jerome says. “So we reduced the number of seats and added bigger tables that give us room for presentation plates, wine glasses and the like. The space allowed me to put in my concept.”

“I have the right kitchen,” says Stephane, and it is once again open to the dining room. “Customers come and talk to me, and I like that.”

The brothers previously owned two restaurants on the harbor in Antibes. Jerome came to the United States about five years ago and met a woman from California on the plane who is now his wife. Stephane followed a few years later. They have worked at Le Charm and Clementine while looking for a place to open their own restaurant.

“I was looking for a neighborhood place, not a downtown place,” says Jerome. “I’m a neighborhood person.”

“We used to have that kind of life in France,” adds Stephane. “We were on the harbor in Antibes, and we knew our neighbors and said hello to the fishermen as they came and went.”

For now, the restaurant is open for dinner every night except Monday. Soon it will begin offering a three-course prix fixe menu for \$25 to \$27 to guests who dine weekdays before 7 p.m.

The Meloni brothers plan to add lunch service this summer, with a simpler menu offered both in the restaurant and outside at tables along Steiner Street.

New Florio Chef Brings Back Classics

ED CAREW, the adventurous chef who steered Florio toward Italy and away from France in recent years, has left to seek an opportunity to own and run his own restaurant.

He has been succeeded by sous chef Collins Anderson, who is bringing back some of the Florio classics as he puts his stamp on the menu.


“Ed was adamant about the full-on Italian aspects,” says owner Doug Biederbeck. “Our new chef is more open to the bistro classics. This seems like a perfect time to revisit some of our old playbook. We’ll be

allowing French food to sneak back on amid the Italian.”

Biederbeck confirmed talk on the street that a more radical overhaul of Florio has been discussed by a potential new owner who would convert it to a Chinese restaurant.

“There is interest, but nothing is imminent,” Biederbeck says. “There is no offer, and our position is that the restaurant is not for sale.”

Biederbeck and his partners also own Bix, the supper club on Gold Alley, and Market Bar at the Ferry Building.



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Lights Are Still Out at the Fillmore Grill

REINCARNATION of the Fillmore Grill — reportedly as the Pacific Heights Bistro — has stalled, and the restaurant at the corner of Fillmore and Clay Streets remains dark.

Contractor Jay O’Neil, owner of Hammerhead Construction, said his company began work April 10 on what was expected to be a nine-week project.

Work was halted after only one week, however, and has not resumed. As of May 25, the Department of Building Inspection had issued no permits for construction at the site.

O’Neil confirmed that the new concept included moving the bar from the back of the restaurant toward

the front, making it more visible from the street.

The restaurant had its ups and downs in the last year and a half. It went through a change in ownership last year and almost immediately had to close for a week for repairs. Early last fall, lunch was discontinued. General manager Alan Walsh said at the time that lunch would be resumed, with a new menu for dinner as well, in November. He postponed that date to January and then to April.

Eventually a decision was made to close the Fillmore Grill as part of a resolution of issues between past and present owners, a process that is said to be continuing.

Roman Osteria Coming to Fillmore as Chez Nous Closes

By Don Langley

CHEZ NOUS, the popular restaurant featuring small plates at 1911 Fillmore Street, has been sold to the operators of A-16, the acclaimed Chestnut Street restaurant, and will close June 3.

The A-16 team will reopen the spot in late July or early August as a casual Italian restaurant called SPQR.

“It’s a big deal for us,” said Chez Nous owner Pascal Rigo. “Chez Nous was our first restaurant and it set the city’s trend toward small plates.” He said the restaurant had “a very good run” of seven years, but he is reducing his involvement in restaurants in order to concentrate on his bakeries.

Rigo said the city’s minimum wage, compounded by new requirements for paid sick leave and health insurance, constituted a “one-two” punch for small businesses such as his. For his company, with small mark-ups, restaurants make “no economic sense,” he said.

He emphasized that he is selling, not closing.

“I’m very attached to Chez Nous,” he said, “but I don’t want to write a check at the end of the month to Mr. Gavin Newsom.”

He will, however, continue to operate Le Petit Robert on Polk Street. The general manager and much of the kitchen staff at Chez Nous will move there, he said, and some of Chez Nous’ signature dishes will follow them. Rigo employs 600 people; 22 of them have been at Chez Nous. He hopes some of the rest of the Chez Nous staff will be hired by the new owners.

Shelley Lindgren, co-owner with her husband Greg of A-16, said SPQR will be a casual neighborhood osteria that has carefully selected wines and a menu that will be affordable enough to eat from every day.

The initials SPQR stand for *Senatus Populusque Romanus*, meaning the Senate and the People of Rome. It appears on everything in Rome from ancient coins to manhole covers.

Victoria Libin, Nate Appleman and Daniel Holzman are all managing partners for SPQR. Appleman and Holzman — friends since cooking school — will be co-executive chefs; Holzman will be at the helm most days and evenings.

Lindgren said the maitre d’ and all the bartenders will be sommeliers. Wines — all Italian — will be served by the glass, carafe and bottle. The current bar will be replaced with a bar that will accommodate about 10 people and the full menu will be available there.

Because there will be just under 50 seats, the operation will be walk-in only. Greg Lindgren is designing the remodel; the result will be “warm, casual and contemporary.”


As at A-16, the philosophy will be to serve an interpretation of classic Italian dishes with high-quality, fresh, local, sustainable products. The restaurant will be open daily for lunch and dinner and will serve brunch on weekends.

The preliminary menu lists two dozen hot and cold antipasti; eight pasta dishes, some of which allow diners to choose a pasta and match it with a choice of sauce; plus five entrees and five desserts. Pasta dishes are priced from \$11 to \$16; entrees from \$17 to \$19. Antipasti are \$7 each, three for \$16 or five for \$25.

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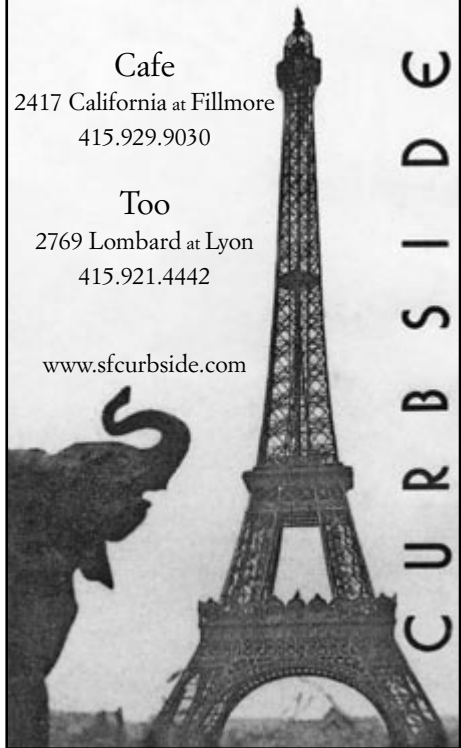
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The Story of a Food Revolution

A neighborhood author's new book tells how Chez Panisse changed our ideas about food

By THOMAS MCNAMEE

THE FACE that Chez Panisse presents to the street at 1517 Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley is both plain and intricately expressive. Climbing or down-spilling vines weave through an arbor and screen fashioned partly of weathered redwood, partly of gray steel bars punctuated with little steel polka dots. A glass-fronted polished copper box displays the day's menus. Above the narrow entranceway is an arc of raw redwood on which the restaurant's name is jauntily, somewhat roughly painted. Behind the screen is a small enclosed terrace with three redwood benches, a potted camellia and a Japanese maple growing through the brick floor with tiny violets at its base. An unruly wisteria sprawls upward into the second-story eaves. Strawberry plants line the pinkish concrete retaining wall.

All this artful jumble — the slow accumulation of Alice Waters' refinements since 1971 — does not conceal the building's beginnings as a humble, rambling old house.

Setting new standards

By 1973, Chez Panisse was setting standards that not only had never been met in America but had never even existed. What Alice Waters and her star chef Jeremiah Tower were doing resembled in many ways the French approach to food, but they were doing it without the historical precedent, the formal training, and the infrastructure that made fresh, seasonal food second nature to the restaurateurs of France.

It was the same virtually all over Europe, all over Asia, indeed in much of the world, where farms were still small and "agribusiness" was unknown. "But not here," said Alice. "Not in Berkeley, not in San Francisco or New Orleans or New York" — not anywhere in the cities of the world's leading industrial nation, the biggest producer and exporter of food on the planet.

The ideal becomes reality

She was well aware of the decline in how America ate, but as yet she saw no hope of changing it. "All I knew was that Chez Panisse could be better than it was."

If there were no farmers in northern California raising chickens comparable to the blue-legged beauties of Bresse, perhaps Alice could persuade a farmer to raise some old, nearly lost noncommercial breed of American chicken.

There was no bread to compare to Poilane's in Paris, but, Alice recalls, "We had a busboy on the staff who decided he was going to keep making bread till he got it right. Steve Sullivan. And he did get it right. We're still serving his bread. We lent him money to start up Acme Bakery." (In its four Bay Area bakeries, Acme now has sales of \$12 million a year, producing several dozen kinds of bread and selling them to some 400 restaurants and retail businesses.)

There were hippies raising goats up in the hills of Marin and Sonoma beginning to learn to make chevre as beautiful as the small-farmstead cheeses of France. But of course



they never advertised. They had to be found. Alice and Jeremiah were finding them — farmer by farmer, artisan by artisan. "We were starting to reach outside our own little circle, telling them, 'You can do this too.'"

The Chez Panisse ideal was coming to fruition — French techniques pepped up with jazzy improvisation, bright-flavored and utterly fresh California ingredients, purity of flavor, simplicity of presentation, seasonality: This was the birth of what came to be called California cuisine.

A simple cafe upstairs

In October 1978, Chez Panisse wine director Jerry Burdick flew to Rome with Bob Waks, of the Cheese Board, and Jay Heminway, whose Green and Red zinfandel would succeed the Phelps zinfandel as the Chez Panisse house red wine. Alice met them in Rome, and they rented a Volkswagen for a drive through Italy.

Stuffed into the Beetle, they picked up a turkey in Florence for Thanksgiving, which they were going to spend at Jay's family's chalet in the Swiss Alps. Along the way, they stopped in Turin, where they found precisely "the next thing."

The four had reservations for a late dinner at a fancy restaurant, but by 3:30 in the afternoon they were ravenous. They stopped in at the first open place they found, a pizzeria.

"We could see a fire burning inside," Alice wrote some years later, "and it pulled us in. And there I had my first pizza out of a wood-burning oven. We all thought it was

the best thing we had eaten on the whole trip." She asked to see how they did it. She was shown the fat oven with its firebrick floor and white-hot oak coals heaped in the corner. The temperature inside was a thousand degrees Fahrenheit. A pizza went in on a long wooden peel, was twirled once, twice, three times so that each side got the full blast of heat from the coals — "with flames swirling around under the ceiling of the oven" — and in less than two minutes it was ready to eat.

"That moment was the real beginning of the cafe," says Alice. "Pizzas were so inexpensive to cook, and it was just so convivial, that little group of people hanging out."

A cafe upstairs at Chez Panisse, a simple cafe, with its own open kitchen and its own pizza oven. It could mean the return of their friends, the regulars, the old-timers who had been priced out as Chez Panisse had become more expensive.

There would be no compromise of Alice's standards. The ingredients would be as fine as those of the formal restaurant downstairs, and the cooking would be just as inventive and skilled, but there would be no truffles, no foie gras, no classic French sauces. The preparations would require much less labor. There would be a small menu, changing daily, according to what was best and best priced on the market that morning. You could order as little or as much as you wanted. You could hang out with your friends. It would be nothing less than the embodiment of Alice's original vision of Chez Panisse.

Small gestures, large examples


By 1984, Chez Panisse had become what Alice wanted, and more. With chef Paul Bertolli firmly at the helm, Alice was free to want more, to expand her horizons, to dream again.

Over the next several years, Alice was involved in a number of experiments aimed at bringing less-affluent buyers into the world of farmers' markets and organic produce. Some were modest successes, but most were unable to surmount the social barrier that made poor people feel uncomfortable in the farmers' market milieu — the expensive foreign cars in the parking lots, the expensive clothing on the shoppers, the embarrassment for people who spoke poor or no English.

Yet Alice was learning that small gestures could set large examples. She was thinking long-term. Each attempt, even when it failed, brought new believers to the cause.

Reaching children was important not only because they might be changed for the rest of their lives, but also because the schools bought food in such immense quantities that if they changed their purchasing patterns, the effects on the landscape and the small-farm economy would be tremendous.


Alice now saw clearly what was to be the mission of the rest of her life. It was all of a piece: from her father's garden to Montessori through the birth and growth and flowering of the Chez Panisse ethos, and ultimately, to the philosophy and practice of sustainability — ecological, agricultural and social.




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Clinton phones, hungry

Late on the evening of August 12, 1993, the junk-food-loving President of the United States phoned Chez Panisse from Air Force One, hungry. Alice was in San Francisco, but a phone call brought her back across the Bay Bridge at high speed. An hour later, Bill Clinton and company descended on Chez Panisse. Trying not to notice the 40 Secret Service agents swarming through the restaurant, Alice did her best to set a scene of gracious hospitality, spreading before the president a late-night snack of golden nugget tomatoes, fettucine with corn and crabmeat, a salad of green beans and chanterelles, pizza without cheese (it was not allowed on his diet), house-cured prosciutto, and for dessert — the course she knew Clinton loved best — blackberry ice cream, blackberry shortcake, raspberries, strawberries, Gravenstein apples and a lemon custard with wild strawberries. Alice wouldn't let him pay.

The *Chronicle's* coverage noted: "Waters, who turned down an invitation to cook at Ronald Reagan's inaugural in 1982 (saying she didn't know where Washington was), took the opportunity to buttonhole the president about San Francisco's Garden Project, where prisoners grow specialty crops for sale to restaurants like hers — and how important it is to be 'connected' to what we eat and grow."

The *Chicago Tribune* picked up another part of the conversation: "While Clinton ate, she says, she discussed her worries about assuring that future generations will have a wide variety of good foods. The president, in turn, told her there had been some talk of starting a vegetable garden at the White House."

Clinton was almost certainly just turning on his customary charm, but to Alice Waters that was an opening wide enough to drive a tractor through. A garden at the White House!

With another blowout fund-raising dinner for the Clintons in March 2000 at the home of Mark and Susie Tompkins Buell in Pacific Heights, Alice's last chance was at hand: Less than a year remained in the president's term in office. The menu was spectacular, with three iterations of dessert:

Truffled risotto fritters and vegetable crudites



Dungeness crab salad and Fairview Gardens white asparagus with watercress mayonnaise



Petaluma duck leg braised with new garlic; fava beans with rosemary noodles



Tangerine granita



Warm chocolate fondant with pecan ice cream

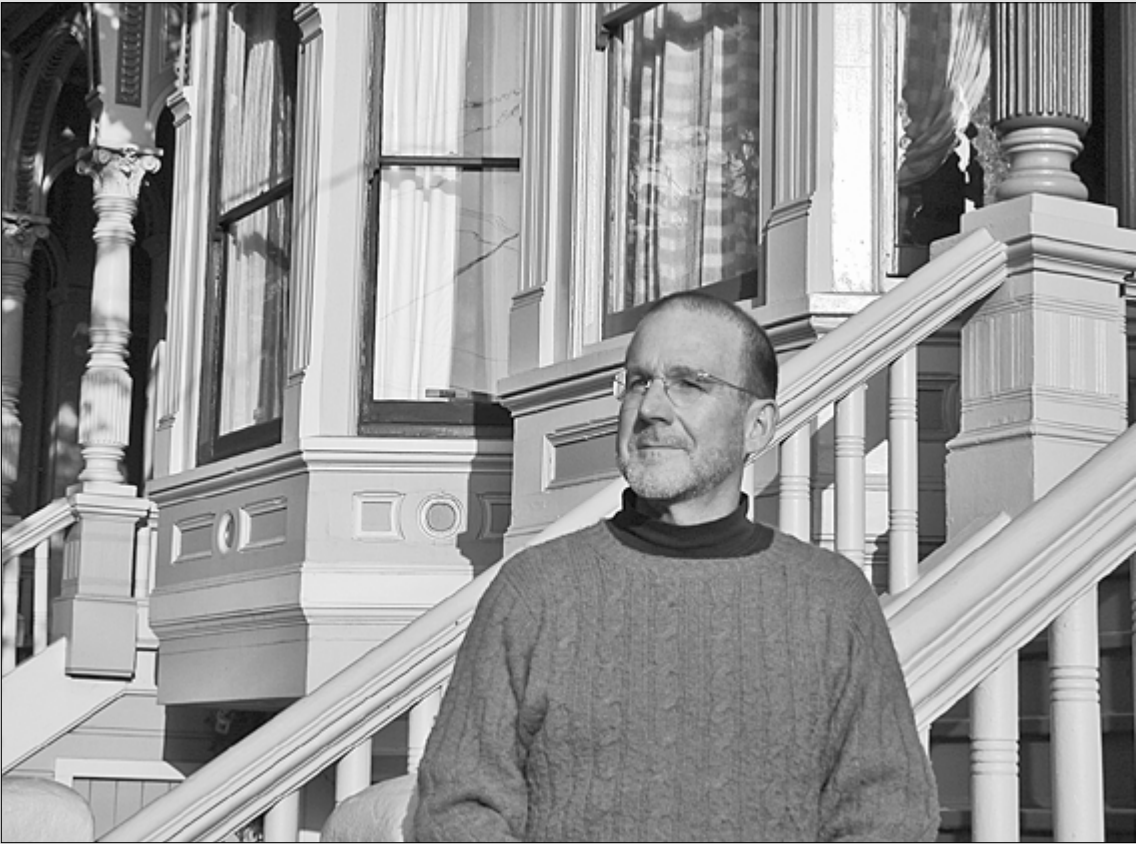


Candies, candied fruits and mint tisane

Alice did not buttonhole the president at the dinner itself, but later she wrote him a letter more imperative than any she had yet dared, urging him, "Mr. President, plant that garden on the White House grounds!"

The president wrote back: "Hillary and I have been interested in the idea of growing fresh herbs and vegetables here at the White House. But we decided that an informal kitchen garden would not be in keeping with the formal gardens of the White House." He noted, however, that they had started a rooftop vegetable garden and an herb garden.

Alice fired back. "I apologize for being so insistent,"



He got it

Alice Waters had been approached by a number of writers who wanted to tell the story of Chez Panisse. But they didn't "get it," and getting it was the whole idea behind *Chez Panisse*.

So she approached Tom McNamee (above), whose work on food and natural history she admired, and asked if he might be interested.

Thus began a four-year project for the Fillmore resident that resulted in *Alice Waters and Chez Panisse*, published this spring, and now enjoying favorable reviews both from critics and the book-buying public.

McNamee wrote the book in the Victorian facing St. Dominic's Church that he and his wife Elizabeth have called home since 1998.

"This neighborhood probably has as high a

percentage of people who care about food as any neighborhood in the world," he says. "And some of my favorite places to eat are just around the corner," Florio and Johnny Rockets among them.

After he wrote the proposal for the book, Waters flew with him to New York to meet with potential publishers. Ever the evangelist for organic fruit and vegetables, she brought along a bowl of tangerines. Every half hour a different publisher came to hear the pitch, leaving with tangerines in tow. Five of the six publishers bid for the rights to publish the book, and Penguin Press won the bidding.

"I was very lucky," McNamee says. "Alice is a celebrity, and as a result I got a lot of money for it."

The *Chez Panisse* book is McNamee's fifth, and he's already at work on his next, a memoir that, he says, "uses food as a way of looking at history."

she wrote. "An informal garden would indeed be out of keeping with the traditional formality of the White House grounds, but ... as you probably know, L'Enfant's original plan for the capital city was inspired by the layout of Versailles, and at Versailles the royal kitchen garden is itself a national monument."

Bill and Hillary Clinton knew a thing or two about stubbornness, too. Neither replied, and that was the end of the correspondence.

No one argues with her palate

The regulars know by now not to be surprised if Alice isn't around. When she is, she will seem to be everywhere at once — up to her elbows in a sink washing lettuce; sticking a finger in a sauce and ordaining a dash of lime juice; shoving logs into the fire, and adjusting the rotisserie; inspecting the recycling cache behind the restaurant to be sure that the cans are spotless, the garbage odorless; sometimes in her trimly fitted kitchen whites, sometimes in one of her unique, unknowable-period dresses, making the rounds of the dining room, kissing friends on both

cheeks, sitting two minutes here, five there, holding both hands of an admirer, pointing out to a busser a dusty inch of molding.

When she is at the restaurant, she will taste every dish produced in both the downstairs and the upstairs kitchens, and she will not be hesitant with her criticism. There are 119 people on the staff of *Chez Panisse*, and not one of them, ever, argues with Alice's palate.

What is remarkable in Alice's absence is the continuing presence of that palate. *Chez Panisse* embodies a system of aesthetic discrimination of deep subtlety and hidden complexity. Alice's standards, her taste in everything from the quality of the light to the silkiness of the butter, her ethical standards, her sense of the restaurant as a family — all these stay behind when she is gone, as strong as when she is here. A common remark from one cook to another who has just tasted the first one's dish is, "Alice would love that."


Excerpted from Alice Waters and Chez Panisse by Thomas McNamee. Published by arrangement with The Penguin Press, a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. Copyright © 2007 Thomas McNamee.

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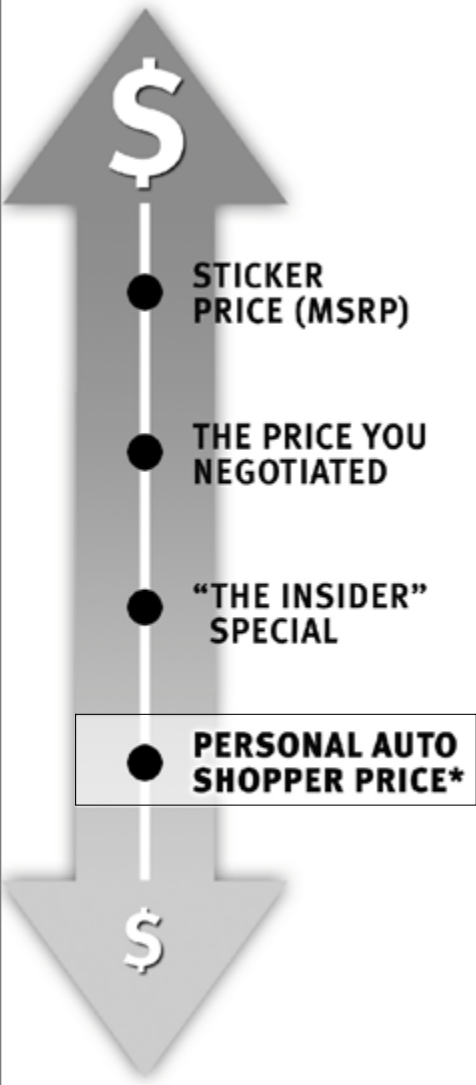
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NEIGHBORHOOD HOME SALES

Single Family Homes	BR	BA	PK	Sq ft	Date	Asking \$	Sale \$
1546 Baker St	2	1	0	1148	4-May	829,000	839,000
1812 Scott St	3	1.5	1	1580	7-May	1,499,000	1,660,000
2904 Bush St	4	2.5	2		27-Apr	1,595,000	1,635,000
3711 Clay St	4	4	1	3714	10-May	1,950,000	NA
2611 Divisadero St	4	5.5	0		10-May	2,995,000	NA
3840 Clay St	6	3	0	5354	25-Apr	3,000,000	4,020,000
1823 Jackson St	8	6	1	5584	1-May	3,050,000	NA
3949 Washington St	5	4.5	2		1-May	4,950,000	4,950,000

Condo / Coop / TIC / Lofts	BR	BA	PK	Sq ft	Date	Asking \$	Sale \$
1817 California St #208	1	1	1	537	10-May	489,000	489,000
2060 Sutter St #204	1	1	1	720	27-Apr	635,000	655,000
1970 Sutter St #13	1	2	2	1081	10-May	775,000	775,000
1633 Lombard St	2	2	1	1032	27-Apr	825,000	785,000
2806 Union St #7	1	1	0	992	25-Apr	820,000	820,000
1800 Washington St #416	2	2	1	1108	24-Apr	869,000	869,000
2325 Divisadero St	3	2	0	1741	26-Apr	1,150,000	1,120,000
3335 Clay St	2	2	1		30-Apr	1,125,000	1,235,000
2402 Washington St	3	2	1	1471	8-May	1,295,000	1,470,000
2547 Washington St #3	2	2	1	1240	3-May	1,450,000	1,550,000
1967 Pine St	3	2.5	2	2361	9-May	1,495,000	1,650,000
2847 Baker St	3	2	1	2101	8-May	1,699,000	1,817,000
2460 Vallejo St	2	2.5	2		8-May	2,095,000	2,305,000
1940 Broadway #9	3	3.5	2		2-May	5,600,000	NA

‘Completely different than the rest of the country’

While a vast majority of the country is experiencing a slowdown in the housing market, San Francisco remains an anomaly, and it doesn't appear that will change anytime soon. At a recent conference in Berkeley, Ken Rosen, an economist and chairman of the Fisher Center for Real Estate and Urban Economics at UC Berkeley, said: "The Bay Area is one of the strongest economies in the country today. The upper end of the market in the inner areas (San Francisco and the counties closest to it) is doing extremely well. This is a completely different trend than the rest of the country."



Also of interest in the neighborhood:

■ After more than two years on the market, an impressive Presidio Heights landmark — Le Petit Trianon at 3800 Washington Street (left) — recently went into contract. If the property closes, it will certainly be one of the most significant — and priciest — sales in San Francisco this year.

■ There has also been a lot of talk about 3840 Clay, a large Edwardian home in need of extensive work. In fact, the carport in the back is partially collapsed. The property was only on the market for a few days before it received several offers. It closed at the end of April for slightly over \$4 million — an impressive 34 percent over the listing price.

■ Who says you can't find a single family home in the Fillmore for under \$1 million? It is possible: 1546 Baker recently sold for \$839,000, just over the asking price. At 1,148 square feet, it's just big enough for a small family.

— Data and commentary provided by JOHN FITZGERALD, co-owner of Byzantium Brokerage and an agent at Pacific Union. Contact him at 345-3034 or jfitzgerald@pacunion.com.

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Big Alma's Home Before the Spreckels Mansion

The elegant, low-key palazzetto at 2100 Vallejo was not the sort of mansion she had in mind

By ANNE BLOOMFIELD
AND ARTHUR BLOOMFIELD

LOW KEY, low key! The mini palazzo designed by the seriously underdocumented Houghton Sawyer at 2100 Vallejo Street claims an exterior which is for the most part inconspicuous. Except that it stands out for a simplicity at once stubborn and felicitous.

In past decades when the house was swathed in romantic vines this austere personality registered somewhat less; now 2100 Vallejo is as clean-shaven as the plans Sawyer drew for the house at his downtown office in 1911.

The rigorously symmetrical Vallejo Street front and the loggia-dominated Buchanan Street side emerge for the architectural sightseer in plain stucco, the simply adorned windows on the resolute face of the building relieved just a little by semicircular transoms on the main floor. The house's restrained aesthetic is pursued further in a loggia filled with lattice to avoid disturbing the plain walls. Yes, there's a cornice, but it doesn't call attention to itself. Even the surrounding garden, which covers three times as much ground as the house, is subdued behind a tall hedge.

Now, the entrance to 2100, up a little walkway on the west side of the house, is impressive, but you have to peek to see it.

It's lovely! Beneath the semicircular balcony are a pair of fluted Doric columns supporting a garland and a group of moldings — dentils, egg and dart, and a succession of rolls and curves — matching those of the cornice. Above the balcony is a large arched opening highlighted by a wide and graceful incurve. Deep recesses hollow out the arch at street and balcony levels, while inside 2100 a grand staircase does nothing to detract from the aristocratic and not unsensuous aura of the entrance.

There have been some changes over the years. When the house was vine-covered it was never painted; it had, in fact, been designed not to be painted and was a sort of sandy color with some textural relief, maybe even sparkles — subdued ones of course. In its present white paint job the effect strikes me as awfully bland. But Arthur says he's bowled over by what he calls the house's "milk of inhuman beauty."



The client was Alma de Bretteville Spreckels, the amazing character who gave San Francisco the California Palace of the Legion of Honor.

DRAWING BY KIT HASKELL

Perhaps he has a point.

(By the way, unpainted stucco can be found on another two important San Francisco houses, both on Russian Hill: One is John K. Branner's 940 Green, dating from 1922; the other is Sawyer's baronial 1001 Vallejo at Taylor, a storybook 1905–06 mansion associated with City of Paris's Paul Verdier.)

For a 1911 house, 2100 Vallejo was a decade or two ahead of its time in offering a version of Georgian or Colonial Revival stripped to a minimum. Bare bones, you might say, but what bones! Sawyer was giving his client the very latest architectural thinking, an elegant, uncluttered design with references to the nation's colonial past.

And his client — well, technically his client — was no less than Alma de Bretteville Spreckels, the amazing character who gave San Francisco the California Palace of the Legion of Honor,

the museum of European art in Lincoln Park overlooking the Golden Gate.

Not long after 2100 Vallejo was built, she commissioned the high-profile Spreckels mansion at 2080 Washington Street. The contrast between the two houses raises some fascinating speculations: why the change in architects, why the change from super-restrained to super-ornate? And the answer lies almost certainly in the six-foot Alma's feisty, ambitious, not exactly understated personality.

Alma was not born with a silver spoon in her mouth or a Pacific Heights mansion in her name. Struggling as a young woman to pay for art lessons, she became an artist's model, attracting the attention of no less than the distinguished sculptor Edgar Walter.

It wasn't long before the tall and voluptuous Alma was switching gears to

pose nude for suggestive oils for the walls of watering holes along the so-called Cocktail Route on Kearny Street south to Market and thence up Powell toward Union Square.

Enter now Adolph Spreckels, Charles Laughton look-alike and scion of a family with a fortune in sugar. Papa Claus lived on Van Ness Avenue until his stately pile was lost in the conflagration of '06, son John had a suitable house around the corner on Pacific, and son Adolph, who was exceptionally fond of boats, racehorses and women (choose the order), had a place in Sausalito, across the unbridged Golden Gate.

Alma and Adolph proceeded to have a long affair, and eventually she persuaded this bon vivant to marry. A little girl was soon added to the family and a couple of years later Adolph installed, or tried to install, wife and kiddie in 2100 Vallejo.

Whether Adolph prompted Sawyer's aggressive avoidance of glitz or the architect was left to his own creative devices is not known; but the latter was very likely the case. In any event, this elegant low-key palazzetto was not, as her lively biographer, Bernice Scharlach, makes abundantly clear, the sort of mansion Alma had in mind.

Alma had title to the house, Adolph paid for it, and by 1913 it was Alma's brothers Oscar and Gus, the latter always her lackey, who settled albeit rather briefly into Vallejo Street. Alma would duly proceed to the Applegarth house of her dreams — she'd been thinking about it when she was a child delivering laundry to back doors.

Most of Alma's family did very well thanks to the Spreckels connection: One of her nephews, Charles de Bretteville, was even president of Spreckels Sugar 40 years later. I would guess that brothers Oscar and Gus were established in stockbroking and real estate respectively through her offices. The parents were made comfortable, too.

The oldest brother, though, he made it on his own. Alexander de Bretteville started out as a machinist. By the time Adolph and Alma were married he was already manager of Main Iron Works, rising later to vice president.

Alma Spreckels maintained that her de Bretteville ancestors were French nobility who escaped from the Revolution to

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June 2007 NEW FILLMORE 13

Up the Hill, and from Super-Restrained to Super-Ornate

► FROM PAGE 13

Denmark. Her father's name would seem to confirm this: Viggo le Normand de Bretteville. She didn't invent the particle "de" before the name; Viggo was using it as early as 1882, when she was only a year old. He was a farmer then, near Lake Merced. By 1894 he'd moved the family to Francisco Street between Polk and Larkin, a Russian Hill address he had for the rest of his life. The 1900 city directory lists him as a teacher of languages, with Matilde de Bretteville, Alma's mother, a masseuse.

And what of 2100 Vallejo? After Oscar and Gus moved out, perhaps in 1915, Alma rented it to stockbroker Eyre Pinckard. Only in 1919 did Alma give title to Oscar, who in turn sold to the Pinckards in 1924. In the 30s, Sawyer's quiet masterpiece was acquired by prominent businessman Louis Benoist, whose widow, Geraldine, died only recently, in Pacific Heights of course, aged more than 100.

A bit more about the architect, Houghton Sawyer. He *was* born with a silver spoon in his mouth, arriving into a well-off family in San Francisco in 1871. And he lived to the age of 90. He had the finest education possible, at Berkeley, Stanford, MIT, London, Paris and Rome. Setting up shop in his hometown, this cultured pro probably had a small office and could lavish personal attention on his well-heeled clients. Adolph Spreckels doubtless chose him because he was socially acceptable: There's something, of course, about a Houghton!

There are few known works of Houghton Sawyer, but all are of high

quality. Besides 2100 Vallejo and the Verdier mansion there are, for instance, a couple of Nob Hill apartment houses, 1001 California Street, kitty-corner from the Fairmont Hotel, and the especially characterful 901 Powell, behind the Fairmont. Near the Presidio Wall, north of Lake Street, he did 2 Fifth Avenue.

The Sugar Palace, the nickname of the Spreckels Mansion at 2080 Washington Street, does not as a matter of fact come from its admitted resemblance to a sugar cube; it refers, rather, to the original owners, Adolph and Alma Spreckels. Everybody used to know SPRECKELS from the bags and boxes of sugar on supermarket shelves bearing that inescapable brand name.

Adolph Bernard Spreckels was prominent in the second California generation of a clan of robber barons. But even a serious historian like James Hart found their adventures superlative:

"By shrewd business methods, Claus [the father] Spreckels came to control all of San Francisco's sugar refineries and established the state's sugarbeet industry. He then financed the Hawaiian Kingdom and controlled much of its cane production and shipping. He also founded a railroad for shipping his produce by a means other than the monopolistic Southern Pacific; organized independent gas, light and power companies to combat the established public utility firms of San Francisco; and created a street railway line in opposition to the established firm.

"He and his two older sons feuded with the two younger ones over control of the family businesses and continued their fight by financing rival gas and electric companies, among other things. ... The second son Adolph was in the family sugar business, and his fury at the *Chronicle's* allegation that it defrauded stockholders led him to shoot publisher M. H. de Young."

San Francisco is littered with sites of Spreckels mansions, but the only ones still standing are Adolph and Alma's confection at 2080 Washington and his distant relative Richard's on Buena Vista

Avenue (lately a bed-and-breakfast), not to mention 2100 Vallejo.

Papa Claus's first mansion, lost in the fire of '06, was at the northeast corner of Seventeenth Street and South Van Ness,

the latter then called Howard Street in that part of town and a fashionable street it was, too — today the area could not be said to be gentrified. Oldest son John's house, also a big one, stood four blocks farther south until quite recently.

Then the Spreckels household moved north.

Near the turn of the century Claus built a Pacific Heights mansion at the southwest corner of Van Ness and Clay, now the site of three large 1920s apartment buildings a degree or two below posh. John followed with his own distinguished pad at the northwest corner of Pacific and Laguna, where newer construction may now be found. Baby

Rudolph meanwhile put up a pillared affair at Pacific and Gough that was replaced about 1970 by the Mormon church currently on the site. Adolph was the last to build, but his and Alma's mansion stands on the highest hill.

It was designed by George Adrian Applegarth, working in an association with Kenneth MacDonald Jr. that also resulted in the Clift and King George hotels in the theater district downtown. On his own, Applegarth designed the Eastern Outfitting Building at 1019 Market, with its delightful five-story Corinthian columns, also the Dante Hospital, now a senior residence, at Van Ness and Broadway, and, surely most significant, the Legion of Honor museum in Lincoln Park.

A 1906 graduate of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Applegarth designed with a French delicacy and sense of spatial organization. On Washington Street, his French Baroque manner shows in the two-story Corinthian columns, intricately wrought metal balconies and round arches. Since a grand symmetrical approach in the French manner was not possible on such a sloping site, Applegarth made the next best thing look perfect: a stone fence that steps grandly downhill in two directions from the corner of Washington and Octavia.

The house was ready just in time for Adolph and Alma to entertain lavishly when the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition opened its doors down by the bay.

Excerpted from Gables & Fables: A Portrait of San Francisco's Pacific Heights, now available from Heyday Books.



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A bike for a benefit

Hank Matheson (above) has a passion for bikes that first took hold when he was in fifth grade. Now, at 22, after training at the United Bicycle Institute in Ashland, Oregon, he designs and fabricates bicycles and participates in the national circuit of downhill racing competitions.

Matheson, a neighborhood native whose parents Henry and Lisille Matheson still live here, has now designed and built a specialized bike that will be auctioned this month to benefit the Oxbow School, a visual arts school in Napa he attended that offers a semester of studio art study to high school students.

Matheson says the design of the race-ready Olympic-quality bicycle, unspoiled by brake lines or cables, is, "the most artistic, hippest thing going on." It's loaded with features acclaimed by bike aficionados: Phil Wood hubs, Velocity rims, Sugino cranks, Sylvan pedals, a Chris Kind head set and a Thompson seat post.

On June 2, the innovative bike will be auctioned at Oxbow alongside other original artwork as part of the Celebration of an Artful Life, an annual fundraiser for the school. The bike is valued at about \$5,000. Matheson believes the buyer is as likely to hang it on the wall as art as to ride it.

Absentee bids will be accepted by Phoebe Brookbank at 707/255-6000 or phoebe@oxbowschool.org. More information is available at www.oxbowschool.org.

St. Dominic's Honors One of Its Own on His 80th

St. Dominic's Church is inviting the neighborhood — and the rest of San Francisco — to a festival honoring Father Felix Francis Cassidy, who will celebrate his 80th birthday on June 3.

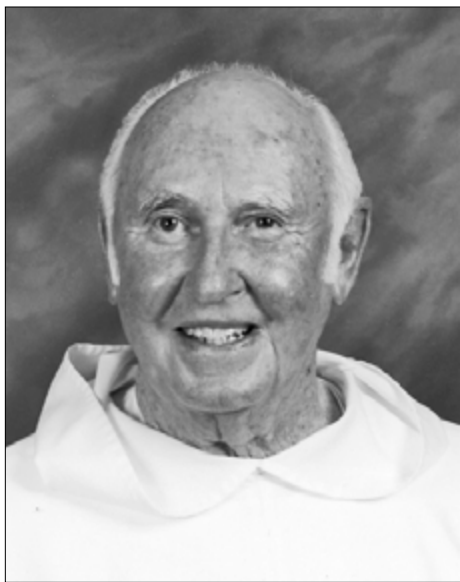
The festival — on Sunday afternoon, June 3, from 1 to 5 p.m. — will include booths, games and barbecue in the parking lot on Pierce Street between Bush and Pine. The festival is both a community party and a birthday celebration for Father Cassidy, a member of the neighborhood community since he was baptized at St. Dominic's in 1927.

In the past, the parish festival was a regular event at St. Dominic's. This year church leaders are bringing back the popular tradition, they say, "to honor the tall white-haired priest in the Dominican habit who exemplifies happiness and goodness."

Young Frank Cassidy attended Grant Elementary School in Pacific Heights and St. Ignatius High School, where he was a member of the swimming team and a cheerleader.

In religious life, he was given the name Felix, which means happy. Church members say it captures Father Cassidy's enthusiastic and joyful presence.

Since 1979, Father Cassidy has served St. Dominic's parish at various times as an associate pastor and as a chaplain for pilgrims to the Shrine of Saint Jude.



Father Felix Francis Cassidy today and (below) in 1949.





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