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A life lesson
at the bus stop

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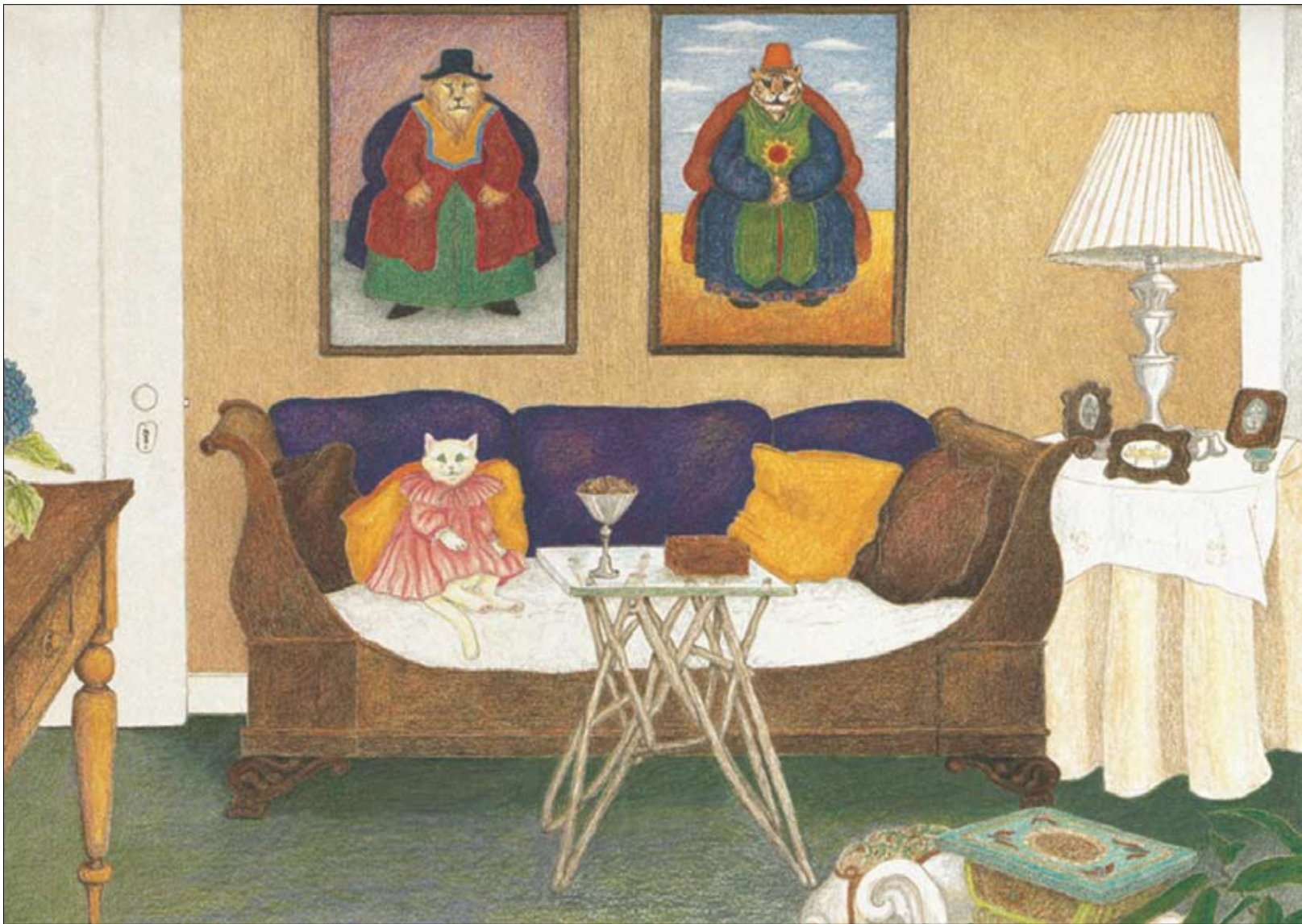
FOOD & DRINK

Majestic is the
right word

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THE NEW FILLMORE

SAN FRANCISCO ■ JANUARY 2009



"Elizabeth in Pink," by Marion Seawell. "Elizabeth is an imaginary cat and her ancestors are also imaginary," Seawell writes. "Everything else is a factual portrayal of my small sitting room in San Francisco." But as with much of her work, there is a deeper, more personal meaning.

Cosmic Cows and Cats

A local artist's journey of self discovery

IN THE BACK PARLOR of a classic Victorian flat on Sacramento Street near Fillmore, there lived for many years a punctilious bookkeeper by day who by night was transformed into a wild Bohemian artist and writer.

With her right hand she painted as Marion Seawell. With her left hand she wrote as M. C. Wells. In both her right-handed paintings and her left-handed writings, she has spent a lifetime exploring the quirks and contradictions of her dual personalities.

This month her two selves come together with the release of a new book, *This Has Certainly Been a Lot of Fun*, which will be accompanied by a rare public showing of her paintings and drawings.

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Victor Cinti: "He was a very special man."

He Paid a Final Visit to the Nursing Home

IT WAS A DAY LIKE ALMOST EVERY OTHER.

Victor Cinti, 87 and moving about with the aid of a walker, left the hotel room near Union Square that had been his home for more than 20 years and traveled across town to visit his wife at the nursing home at Divisadero and Pine Streets.

He made the trip nearly every day. But on Sunday, December 14, he did not return home.

About 2:30 p.m., he left the nursing home and made his way to Japantown. As he crossed Geary Boulevard at Webster Street, Cinti was run over by a car and killed. He was pronounced dead at the scene, his walker still visible on the side of the road.

Police say he was apparently crossing the eight lanes

of Geary against a green light and on the roadway, as pedestrians frequently do, even though there is an overhead crosswalk.

"He was a very special man," said Christine Pelgone-Herz, executive director of the Golden Gate Health Care Center at 2707 Pine Street. Cinti's wife of 56 years, Marie, has been a resident of the facility for several years.

At a memorial at the nursing home a few days later, on Thursday, December 18, a small group gathered in the lobby to sing "How Great Thou Art" and "Amazing Grace" and see Marie Cinti, helped by two attendants, move slowly to the center of the room. "He was a kind man," a social worker read for her. "I miss him terribly."

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LETTERS



ALVIN JOHNSON

Celebrating St. Dominic's

TO THE EDITORS:

Thank you for the wonderful article and layout of our stained glass windows in the December issue of the *New Fillmore*.

We are planning an event in January to celebrate the progress made so far on our church restoration. As you may have noticed, removal of the scaffolding in the church revealed the splendor of the newly restored stained glass windows in the front entry, including our magnificent *Christ in Glory* window, in time for our Christmas celebration. In October, we began the most recent phase of our ongoing restoration project, the repair of the sacristy and south confessional windows and walls.

On Saturday, January 10, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., St. Dominic's will host a celebration for the progress made so far in restoring its historic church building. Thirty-minute tours will begin every half hour in the main entrance of the church at Steiner and Bush, with the last tour starting at noon. Refreshments will be served and restoration exhibits will be on display in the Parish Hall. See what's been done, and what remains to be done, to restore this architectural treasure.

MARIA VICKROY-PERALTA
Development Director
St. Dominic's Catholic Church

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2130 Fillmore Street #202 ■ San Francisco, CA 94115
415 / 441-6070
editors@newfillmore.com

Editors Barbara Kate Repa & Thomas R. Reynolds
Production Ginny Lindsay **Proofreader** Donna Gillespie

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Happy New Year to our neighbors!

Every month, 20,000 copies are delivered to homes and businesses in the Fillmore, Pacific Heights and Japantown. We thank you for your support and encouragement and we welcome your ideas and suggestions.

Archive of recent issues: www.NewFillmore.com

Comments and letters about neighborhood issues are welcome there, too.

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VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

African American Read-In February 2, 2009

In honor of Black History Month and to encourage a love of reading, volunteers are needed to read books by African American authors and/or illustrators in San Francisco elementary school classrooms.

The event is being organized by San Francisco School Volunteers, a nonprofit organization that for 44 years has been recruiting, supporting and engaging volunteers to help public school students achieve their full potential. It will take place at elementary schools in San Francisco on February 2 from 9 to 9:30 a.m. or 10 to 10:30 a.m.

A brief training by San Francisco School Volunteers is required prior to the event. Details on what school you will read at are given at the training. For questions and to sign up, go to www.sfsv.org or contact Amy Reese at 415-749-3700 x3001.



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FIRST PERSON



A Life Lesson Learned While Waiting for the Bus

This note was posted at the 1-California bus stop at Sacramento and Buchanan, across the street from California Pacific Medical Center, on the day after Christmas.

YOU WERE standing here, waiting for the bus, and so was I. I asked if you worked at the hospital, and you said: “No, I have cancer. I went to see the doctor. He just told me I won’t see Christmas.”

Something happened to me after I heard you say this. All I could feel was your energy, like I connected with your pain. You looked so healthy, so strong and very young for your age. I couldn’t understand why you would have to die.

You talked to me about your beautiful life. Then the bus came and you said to me as you shook my hand: “I’m not sure what your name is, but it was a pleasure talking with you today.”

We got on the bus. I wanted to sit near you, to let you know that I was sorry about what was happening, or to say something that would comfort you; but I didn’t seem to get any words out of my mouth. You got off the bus a few minutes later. That was the last thing I knew of you . . .

I don’t even know your name, but I have been thinking about you ever since I met you. You changed my life. Knowing about you has allowed me to live more fully.

Today I want to believe that you are still with us, inhabiting this world. I want to thank you for being such a beautiful instrument for my peace. After meeting you, I walk slower, I sing more, I complain less, I hug more, I talk to strangers, I think less, I live more.

May peace be with you, wherever you are.

Love,
Diana

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BODY & SOUL

Kicking Off the New Year — Naturally

JUST INSIDE the door of Clary Sage Organics, which opened last summer at 2241 Fillmore Street, are shelves neatly stocked with bottles of supplements, herbs, teas and tinctures, all arranged under beckoning headings:

- body balance and weight
- digestive cleanse
- immunity builder
- mood and sleep
- hormone harmony
- energy enhancer.

The potions are essential ingredients for store co-owner Daniel Kalish, who has pioneered a model of natural medicine that he says can help relieve common health maladies ranging from poor digestion to female hormone imbalance.

Kalish is a longtime natural health care practitioner and nutrition instructor who also trains doctors in functional medicine, which combines scientific testing of key measures such as serotonin and dopamine levels with natural therapies. He calls it “preventive medicine at its best” — and now offers it at the Fillmore store, which is staffed with wellness advisors and natural medicine practitioners to counsel customers on individual products or design a program to help combat more persistent problems.

Kalish also offers hope to those feeling fat, fatigued or depressed after weathering the excesses of the holidays. Eating too much and exercising too little are the common causes. But also, he says, the light level is lower this time of year, which naturally causes a drop in serotonin, the brain chemical that regulates mood.

“When serotonin levels drop, you get depressed — and you eat more,” he says.

Kalish, who has treated thousands of patients in his 15 years of working with natural medicine, has also recently written a book, *Your Guide to Healthy Hormones*.

Kalish says the three major stresses on the body are emotional, dietary and inflammatory injury or illness. Most people experience at least emotional and dietary stress in spades around the holidays.

“Either your family comes to visit and you’re stressed out because you can’t stand having them around for that long — or you’re feeling lonely because you’re alone,” he says. “And everyone tends to eat too much and drink too much around this time.”

That leads to body imbalances that cause the common post-holiday maladies of weight gain and depression. But Kalish says there are tangible steps people can take to reverse the holiday imbalance fairly quickly — and naturally.

1. Soak up the sun.

Contrary to the common wisdom of late, Kalish advises getting as much sunlight as possible — and holding the sunblock.

“We’ve overcorrected massively for the potential bad effects of the sun,” Kalish says. “And that’s caused many people to have low levels of vitamin D, which can be



*“If you’re feeling fat, fatigued
or depressed, we can fix it
almost all the time.”*

— DANIEL KALISH, co-owner of Clary Sage Organics,
whose natural remedies are shown above

WELLNESS CLASSES

To kick off the new year, two free educational programs will be offered this month at Clary Sage Organics, 2241 Fillmore, both starting at 6:30 p.m.

JANUARY 7 Depression Free Using Natural Health Solutions
JANUARY 21 Keeping the Weight Off

bad for bones, energy levels, mood and immune system functions.” While the old-fashioned way to increase vitamin D levels was to take cod liver oil, the new-fashioned way is to take pills or supplements.

But according to Kalish, the sun alone can do the job for most people. “We all need 15 or 20 minutes of sun exposure daily if we can get it,” he says, “preferably with as much skin exposed as possible.”

2. Change your diet.

“The most important thing you can do is eliminate gluten and pasteurized dairy products,” says Kalish.

“That’s been my trick for the last 15 years.”

He says that while starchy carbohydrates such as rice, corn and potatoes are fine for most people, pasta and bread can be hard to digest even for those who are not gluten-sensitive — and can make them feel bloated, tired, anxious or depressed.

“The best kind of cleansing diet for this time of year is to go gluten-free for a month,” he says. “I’ve had tremendous success with that. Most people find it gives them a lot more energy and at least a little bit of weight loss.” After one strict month, he encourages patients to load up on gluten — from pancakes for breakfast to pasta for dinner — to see how different they feel.

Kalish says history offers wisdom for eating well. “If a food was around 5,000 years ago, you can eat it: meat, seafood, all fruit and vegetables, eggs,” he says. “But say no to anything in a package — and anything you can’t pronounce. The goal is to get all the chemicals out of your diet.”

To that end, Kalish recommends shopping on the periphery of the grocery store, where the fresh foods are generally stocked, and avoiding the processed foods in the center aisles.

3. Do a cleansing.

A basic clean-up involves three parts: enzymes that aid digestion, fiber that removes toxins and dietary supplements that boost the immune system.

“The first week or so, you might feel a little tired,” says Kalish. “After that, you’ll start to get an energy boost — and your skin will look better.”

For those suffering the aftereffects of consuming excess alcohol over the holidays, Kalish recommends a liver cleanse — particularly one aided by black radish root and cystine, which together force the liver to clear out toxins. But such a cleanse, he says, should not be reserved only for those who have overindulged in eggnog.

“If you go outside on Fillmore and take a deep breath, the air is filled with toxins,” says Kalish. “A cleanse is a good thing for everyone to do seasonally — perhaps at the beginning of the year and the start of summer.”

Toxins also enter the body through skin and beauty products such as perfume, deodorant and make-up. “If it’s lipstick, you’re eating it,” he says, emphasizing the importance of researching products and choosing ones that are safe and organic.

“The solution to pollution is dilution,” Kalish says, making good hydration another component of a cleanse — at least half an ounce of water daily per pound of body weight, or 50 ounces for a 100-pound person.

Kalish acknowledges the natural approach requires some discipline and perseverance.

“I’m not opposed to all conventional medicine,” he says. “We’re not a replacement for emergencies, for treating heart attacks or tumors. But traditional western medicine is not good at handling non-emergency, chronic conditions. If you’re feeling fat, fatigued or depressed, we can fix it almost all the time.”



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He's Got a Soft Spot for Sweaters

BY MARJORIE LEET FORD

PICTURE an ancient barn in ye olde England with fluffy white lambs nibbling the bright green grass. Smoke puffs from the chimney of a nearby house, where Elizabeth Bennett and her sisters knit by the fire. They've been at this so long their needles fly without missing a stitch.

They use fine yarn and make stitches so intricate each sweater takes about 200 hours of knitting. They sell a few of their hand-made treasures to Harrods in London, a few to Barney's in New York, and some to a small set of stores in San Francisco — two of them in the greater neighborhood — called Three Bags Full.

Bernard Faber, founder and proprietor, discovered the barns and the lambs — and the ladies who knit — many years ago when he took a weekend in Stratford while studying at the London School of Economics. Later, as a professor of urban studies at the University of Aberdeen, he realized



"Sweaters represent security, comfort, intimacy. That's a funny thing to say, but it seems to be true."

— BERNARD FABER, proprietor of Three Bags Full

his heart was actually in rural studies. And he had a soft spot for sweaters.

"They're supple. They become a second skin," Faber says. "They take on the shape of our bodies as we move around."

He's found that a good pullover or cardigan can last forever.

"Most people have drawers full of

sweaters, some with holes, but they just can't part with them," Faber says.

"They represent security, comfort, intimacy. That's a funny thing to say about a garment — something that is inanimate — but it seems to be true."

This year, in April, he and his wife Linda will celebrate the 30th birthday of Three Bags Full. Now there are

three in San Francisco — one on upper Sacramento Street that's the size of a shoe box, or maybe a little shop on the Left Bank in Paris. Faber himself hides away in an aerie with skylights above the Union Street store. His office is a jumble of books and paintings and samples of yarn, with a door ajar leading to a secret hillside garden. A third store is near Union Square, and there's a fourth on Montana Avenue in Santa Monica.

It was through books and stories that I met Faber — or almost met him — 14 years ago. On KQED he'd heard a show I'd produced, part of a National Public Radio series called *Tell Me a Story*, with great authors reading short stories. He sent a letter of love for one called "Mr. Nabokov," by Hannah Green, and wondered if he could buy a tape. Sure, just send a check for \$10. He sent a check for \$350 — for the tape, plus a contribution to support the series. I wrote him a letter gushing with thanks and stopped in a few times, hoping to meet him. But he was always gone — probably to the English countryside to find more nibbling sheep and ladies knitting.

This year I did meet him and finally got to thank him in person. I also thanked him for his wonderful sweaters — I have one that's now almost as old as Three Bags Full.

"They are," he says, "a gift from nature to us."

From Fillmore to Nevada for Obama

He had to do something, so he helped win a battleground state

BY BERNARD BUTCHER

IT'S EARLY September and I've wandered from our home near Alta Plaza Park down Fillmore to have coffee and read the newspaper at the Grove. The Republican convention has just ended with Sarah Palin making the big splash — darn right and you betcha. Civil liberties violated, war of choice continuing, economy crashing, incumbent Republican president approval rating at 28 percent and a truly inspiring opposition Democratic candidate — and still the polls are at 50-50 with 20 states too close to call. John McCain, basically a pretty good guy, has sold his soul to the wizards that got George W. Bush elected twice.

"I have to do something," I grumble to my sympathetic wife Lynne. She knows I'll be impossible to live with until election day, so she agrees I should volunteer to work on Barack Obama's campaign and she will assume double duty running our businesses.

The next scene is a two-day Camp Obama at Sacramento High School. There are 120 people, all ages and races, one common theme: "I can't take it anymore!" There's lots of "fired up — ready to go" locker room talk, but also a pretty good primer on the campaign, community organizing and phone banks. I volunteer — for the duration — for the battleground state of Nevada, which has only five electoral votes, but Bush won there both times by just 20,000 votes.

I'm assigned to help paid staffer Iris Malone set up a new field office in the town of Fernley, just off the Truckee River 35 miles east of Reno. Iris is a fiery, competitive, 5-foot 2-inch no-sleep dynamo from Grass Valley just about ready to celebrate her 19th birthday. Taking a semester off from Cornell, Iris is already a campaign veteran of primary stints in New Hampshire,

New York and Pennsylvania, as well as the Nevada caucuses. She's been full-time since June and she knows her stuff.

A bunch of us are beaver away in the office late one night and Iris leans back, puts her feet on the desk and says, "I can't believe I'm bossing around people twice my age." Then she looks over at me and adds, "or three times my age."

I know from television and my email in-box that Obama is pretty good at raising money and pulse rates, but the organization, computerization and discipline of this campaign at the lowest field office level is something to behold. There are five regional directors and 40 field offices for the small state of Nevada alone — and a voter registration drive that has netted 90,000 new Democrats. Each voter in the state has been profiled, sliced and diced in every possible way in the database. Strategies designed in Chicago hit the field offices the next day along with scripts and specific target "universes" to approach and daily goals for everything from doors knocked on to calls made to volunteers recruited. And the results of each day's canvassing are fed into the computer so the database can be refreshed by midnight.

I work a lot of nearby towns like Virginia City and a development called Rainbow Bend next to the infamous Mustang Ranch — open to tourists but not political peddlers, unfortunately. But I end up taking charge of the county seat, the pretty little farming town of Yerington, located 50 miles to the south. It's a nice daily commute from the Truckee to the Carson to the Walker River valley. It's a Republican bastion, as are most rural areas, but with a great nucleus of dedicated Lyon County Democrats.

Yerington is a Hatfields and McCoy's kind of town.

TO PAGE 8 ▶



Volunteer Bernard Butcher with his candidate — sort of — on election night in Yerington, Nevada.

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A Local In Nevada for Obama

► FROM PAGE 7
The Republican casino on Main Street hosts the McCain office. Our office is at Dini's, the Democratic casino. They're separated only by the convention center in which the voting will take place.

In six weeks I get to know this town of 4,000 people better than the mailman — the neat developments in town, dusty doublewides out in the desert, Piute Indian reservations and cheap housing up by the Kennecott copper mine, abandoned since 1977 and surely a Superfund site.

The landed gentry run the place, but most people don't have much. Universally they're hospitable and fun to talk to, but politically they're San Francisco's polar opposite. They don't want to lose their guns, their water rights or their off-road vehicle trails out in the wilderness.

Many are giving Obama a fair look after eight years of Bush. Some support McCain for good reasons — "I'm a vet and he'll be stronger on national defense." Others pick up instantly on the Fox or talk radio smear of the day. Most common: "I just don't trust him" — a cover for all sorts of lingering emotions.

■
As each week wears on, we've all got a big job to do to prepare for the flood of Californians washing over the Sierra to help out on the weekends. We meet more than 100 volunteers every Saturday morning at the Fernley Senior Center. We've prepared for each of them



Mrs. Dewson goes to Washington

Naturally Fillmore's hat lady, Ruth Dewson, is planning to attend the inaugural festivities in Washington, D.C., later this month. And naturally she has a mission, set forth in a poem to the president-elect in her holiday card, which concludes: "All you need now is a Mrs. Dewson's hat!"

a clipboard with handouts, a script, a detailed map of the turf they're to cover, plus names and details of each house they're supposed to hit that day. They get a quick briefing from Iris and then head out with one of us full-time volunteers. I take 10 to 20 of them down to Yerington with me, asking them to park their Priuses and Lexus SUVs with California plates as inconspicuously as possible.

With four weeks to go, we're about to enter the stepped-up get out the vote drive during Nevada's early voting period. I decide to take a couple of days off for a visit home to the Fillmore and a bit of the fresh sea breeze taken at the top of Alta Plaza. Then it's back for the final stretch, during which we're able to get 50 percent of our targeted voters down to the courthouse to vote before election day.

The trends are going our way, but you'd never know it by the urgency of the nightly statewide conference calls.

■
On election day, the pressure is on to get every one of our identified supporters to the polls. I have a great group of 10 Californians and 10 more locals dropping door hangers at 6 a.m. and circling the neighborhoods nudging people until an hour before the polls close. Then we take our life-sized Obama cardboard cutout over to Dini's casino to await the results.

As in a million other places around the country, clenched fists hit the air when the election is called shortly after 8 p.m. Tears flow as we watch the historic scene in Chicago's Grant Park projected onto the big screen.

We even win Nevada.

■ NOTES FROM THE FRONT

One night I represent Obama at a candidate's night at Smith Valley High School in a beautiful high valley south of Yerington, Nevada. The only question after my three-minute pitch is "What's Obama's position on guns?" One aggressive high school freshman corners me later to say he's done the research for a class project and learned for sure that Obama is a Muslim with nefarious intentions. A few of the organizing ladies serving cookies afterwards tell me on the sly they're closet Democrats supporting Obama, but have to keep it quiet.

■
I'm talking to one fairly coy person in Yerington listed on my computer printout as undecided. I ask her how she will make her decision. She says she will decide based on experience. "That's too bad," I say, "since McCain is older and has had more experience in government." "No," she replies, "I mean *life* experience." Turns out she's read Obama's book and been impressed.

■
There's an assisted living center in Yerington that my computer printout says is full of octogenarians and up — mostly registered Republicans. When I get there looking for Democrats, I'm quite discouraged until I walk by the room of a 92-year-old laying on his bed watching television with his artificial leg on the floor by his side. He's not in the best shape, but we have a great conversation. On election day, I get the idea to ask him to round up all the Democrats so I can haul them to the polls, leaving the immobile Republicans behind. He answers the phone weakly and says he'd love to do it, but has taken a fall the day before and is now "not even on my last leg."

— BERNARD BUTCHER

He Had a Final Visit With His Wife

► FROM PAGE ONE

Joe Middlebrooks, who described himself as "part of his extended family at Golden Gate," had helped Cinti get his last walker.

"This is not a sad occasion," Middlebrooks said in tribute, recalling the Biblical promise of mansions in heaven. "I never lived in a mansion before. But I plan on it. We will say goodbye for now, but we will see him on the other side."

The Cintis had lived together at the Union Square Plaza Hotel, on Powell Street near the cable car turnaround, until he was no longer able to care for her. She moved to the nursing home, but he stayed alone, spending his days wandering around the city on his walker.

A staffer from the hotel recalled Cinti

as "like the godfather" — always dressed well with a hat and scarf. "Every morning he got change for the bus from my dad," he said, "then came to see Marie."

"Who does not remember Victor and his gifts?" asked Pelgone-Herz in her opening remarks about Cinti, recalling that he usually carried a bag that contained candy or an orange or some little gift for everyone. "He was very generous with his compliments, too. He visited us in the office every day after visiting Marie on the second floor, then said goodbye in many languages."

The nursing home hosts quarterly memorial services in honor of residents who die.

"But this is the first time we've done a memorial for a family member of a

resident," said Pelgone-Herz. "He was just such a friendly man — it was hard not to like the guy."

Another staffer remembered that Cinti liked Japantown and had many friends there.

"He loved going to Japantown," said Pam Champney, the business office manager. She recalled seeing him in Japantown one day and noticing that everybody seemed to know him.

"And then he won the lottery two weeks ago — \$400," Champney said. "He was rich. He liked to spend money, and he was very generous, too."

"We didn't realize how close we were until this happened," she said. "He touched all of our hearts — and we didn't realize it until he was gone."

At 80, an Artist Shares Her Journey of Self-Discovery

► FROM PAGE ONE

It is said that all art is autobiographical, and that is especially true of Marion Seawell's work. While her paintings and drawings can be enjoyed by almost anyone — especially anyone who loves animals, as she does — they are in fact a journey of self-exploration. These are cosmic cows and cats and horses and dogs.

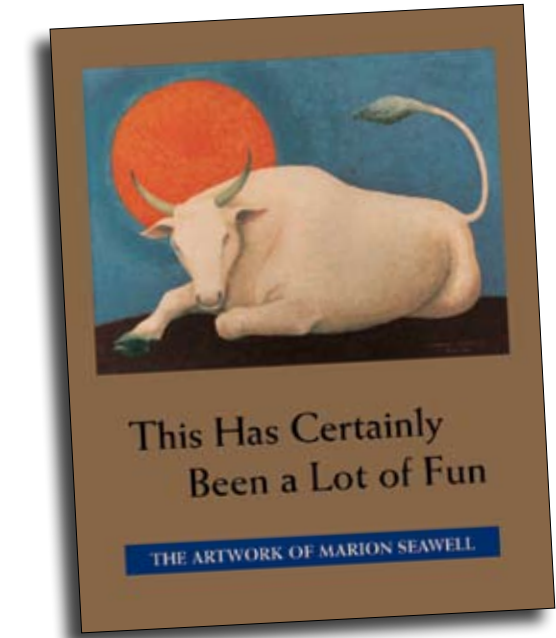
"I painted rather than write *Mommie Dearest*," says the longtime neighborhood resident, with only a fraction of jest, from her retirement home in Marin County. "Painting is good therapy." Many of her drawings and paintings explore her relationship with her domineering mother, although you wouldn't necessarily know it on first viewing.

Consider "Yakima Auto Repair," a large painting that shows her father working on the family car as a small dog climbs into the back seat. Seawell writes: "Luckily, my second personality has a healthy sense of self-esteem. In real life, she is the part that told my other half the cause of many problems. In this painting, she is the mechanic and the auto represents the rest of me. The dog symbolizes my mother getting into the back seat, rather than driving the car." In the background are tombstones.

Another painting, "The Performers," shows a pianist and a rider on horseback. She writes: "Here are my two personalities in their dream performances. One always wished she could be a lovely lady and a gifted pianist. The other showoff longed to be a fabulous nightclub singer riding a trick horse."

Now 80, and both older and wiser, Seawell says much of her artwork came from her subconscious.

"I didn't realize I was working out psychological problems when I did



■ COMING THIS MONTH

This Has Certainly Been a Lot of Fun, which includes 60 of Marion Seawell's paintings and drawings, will be released January 10 at a reception from 3 to 5 p.m. at the Thomas Reynolds Gallery at 2291 Pine Street. The reception will also open a small exhibition of her work, which will continue at the gallery through January 31.

those paintings," she says. It was when she reached her 50s that her alter ego, M. C. Wells — the name came from a misaddressed letter meant for M. Seawell — began speaking to and through her. She filled dozens of journals, writing with her left hand, even though she did everything else right-handed.

"I was told about things I did not understand," she says, "not at the time anyway."

Seawell was well-educated in art. She had started drawing horses — "hundreds and hundreds of horses," she says — as a little girl. During her senior year in high school, her mother moved her to Carmel, where she took drawing lessons from the noted California artist Henrietta Shore. Later she studied at the San Francisco Art Institute.

"There was a period when I was thinking I wanted to be a successful artist,"

she says. "But by then I was a full-time bookkeeper. I enjoyed doing bookkeeping because I worked for interesting people — and I was a very good bookkeeper."

SHE PAINTED for herself, and mostly about herself, even if she didn't always know it at the time.

"I was serious about painting," she says. "At one point I wrote my bookkeeping clients and said I was quitting to become a full-time artist. That lasted about six weeks." For her, the idea of making money from her art seemed wrong.

She took her slides to a gallery and antique store on Union Street, the Pantechnicon, which was run by retired ad man Innis Bromfield. "Aren't you a bookkeeper?" asked Bromfield, who remembered she had worked for a former colleague. So she became his bookkeeper rather than one of his artists. But when

he saw a drawing she had made of a pyramid of cats, he knew it was special, and helped her place an ad in *The New Yorker* promoting prints of the drawing as an "elegant feline fantasy." His copywriter instincts were still strong. Said the ad: "It is a mysterious and satisfying work of art that even dogs enjoy."

"We immediately received 3,000 orders," Seawell says. "The San Diego Zoo gift shop became a steady customer." The original drawing is now in the Achenbach Foundation at the Fine Arts Museums. She went on to create several other drawings that were also widely distributed as prints.

BEING AN artist sometimes caused problems for her bookkeeping business. "People sometimes think artists are irresponsible," she says, "so I was very secretive about being an artist." While she worked for a prominent San Francisco family, she had an exhibition at the late and much-lamented William Sawyer Gallery on Clay Street. It was clear they did not approve. "So I quit," she says. "I was very proud of that show."

Now she realizes she got something even more important than fame or fortune from her painting. She gained understanding and acceptance of herself.

"I don't think I ever felt it was my destiny to be a full-time artist," she says. "It was just the only thing anybody ever praised me for when I was growing up — drawing horses."

Her eyesight is failing now — she can no longer see well enough to paint or draw. But a few days after Christmas, M. C. Wells was telling her not to stop — not to be a chicken — and she has begun to study watercolor.

"I am happier now than I have ever been," she says.

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Harps Will Be Blowing This Month at Yoshi's

By ANTHONY TORRES

MARK HUMMEL and the Blues Harmonica Summit is coming to Yoshi's this month for what should be a straight-up full-blown dose of harmonica-driven blues. It promises to be a mini-blues festival featuring some of the premier players in the genre.

The summit, which began in 1991, will offer an opportunity to experience a real-deal harmonica jam session. If you're into the blues, it should completely rock the joint.

As a kid, I found it difficult to come across the blues. I had to scour alternative music stations to find blues programs and network with musicians just to get a small spattering of the recordings of blues giants like Howling Wolf, Muddy Waters, B.B. King — and harmonica players like Little Walter, Walter "Shakey" Horton and James Cotton.

Later, picking up the instrument and learning to play, I realized that what distinguishes the best of the best is less a matter of skill — who's better — than

whose style you prefer. At a certain point, they are all performing at the highest levels of virtuosity.

Harmonica summit founder Mark Hummel has crafted a signature harmonica sound that is at once subtle, fluid and aggressive. Perhaps it is his credibility as a player that has contributed to the legitimacy of the shows, which regularly command sellout crowds wherever the summit is convened.

This no doubt explains the presence of the legendary blues master and harmonica player Charlie Musselwhite, a Grammy nominee and multiple award winner who has recorded and performed with

everyone from Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker to Bonnie Raitt and Mick Jagger. Musselwhite, for my money, is easily one of the most sophisticated and original harp players of all time. Not only can he swing, but he is also capable of playing with hauntingly beautiful finesse, as evidenced in his version of "Christo Redentor."

Also featured will be 2009 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame nominee Lee Oskar, best known as an original member of WAR and for his playing on hits like "The World is a Ghetto" and "Slippin' Into Darkness." It will be interesting to see what he does in the context of the harmonica summit, since his music has

hardly been associated with or defined as the blues. His style is unique compared to the other players who will perform.

Also at the summit will be Curtis Salgado, a former member of the Robert Cray band and vocalist for Santana. Salgado has a style that is reminiscent of the Blues Travelers' John Popper, although more constrained and personal.

And then there's Johnny Dyer, an old-school blues singer and harp player born in Muddy Waters' hometown of Rolling Fork, Mississippi, who recently recorded a Muddy Waters tribute called "Rolling Fork Revisited."

Given the participants, what you have is a recipe for a good old blues extravaganza featuring some of the greatest players around. "Mark Hummel's Blues Harmonica Blow Out" takes place twice a night at Yoshi's from January 29 to 31.

Also this month in the Fillmore Jazz District, the Progressive Alliance is producing one of its Concerts for Change, benefiting organizations that serve the homeless and the hungry. This series of benefit concerts features some of the best jazz funk bands in the Bay Area. Upcoming on January 25 is the Fil Lorenz Soul-Kestra, a high-energy 14-piece soul-jazz-funk orchestra that's sure to get you dancing.

The show starts at 8 p.m. at Rasselas Jazz Club & Restaurant at 1534 Fillmore Street between Geary and O'Farrell, and all ages are welcome until 10 p.m. Proceeds benefit Glide Memorial Church, Raphael House and Dolores Street Community Services.



Mark Hummel brings legendary players to this year's harmonica summit, returning this month to Yoshi's.

GRANT KESSLER

FAVORITES



SPQR has one of the year's top dishes

Editors of *Food & Wine* magazine eat a lot of dishes in a lot of restaurants during the course of a year. In their year-end issue, they identify what they call "the year's 10 most amazing dishes." One of them comes from Fillmore Street.

Of the rigatoni carbonara at SPQR, Kate Krader writes: "Growing up, my favorite dish was the spaghetti carbonara at Trattoria da Alfredo in New York — James Beard ate there, too, though I had no idea who he was then. Later, I got Alfredo's cookbook, saw how obscenely rich the dish was and promptly stopped eating it. Then, a few months ago, I went to SPQR, the tiny Italian spot co-owned by Nate Appleman of A16. SPQR offers a choice of spaghetti or rigatoni for its classic pastas ("Old, old restaurants in Rome let you choose," Appleman says), and I was curious to try a short, fat noodle with carbonara. The wonderfully chewy handmade pasta, tossed with porky guanciale, eggs (1 1/2 per serving) and plenty of black pepper and grated pecorino, made me wish SPQR were just blocks from where I live, like Alfredo was. But it's better for my diet that it isn't."

It's just blocks from where we live, though. SPQR is at 1911 Fillmore.

FOOD & DRINK

Majestic Living Up to Its Name Again

New chef, bartender and general manager are orchestrating a renaissance

By CHRIS BARNETT

CARS STREAK south on Gough toward the freeways. Unless snagged by the red light at Sutter, they pass a majestic Victorian hotel with landmark status and, to locals, a rollercoaster reputation for service, style, cuisine and cocktails.

Built in 1902 as the private home of railroad baron and state senator Milton Schmidt, it morphed into the Hotel Majestic two years later. Spared from a fiery death when the 1906 inferno rampaging west from downtown was stopped two blocks away at Van Ness, it now lays claim as the city's oldest continuously operated hostelry.

Today, after its bar and restaurant have opened and closed countless times and hotel managers have come and gone, the 56-room Majestic is enjoying something of a renaissance. It's worth a visit just to meet the new cast of characters.

General manager Bonnie Birk was a trapeze artist who soared without a net before climbing the ladder to hotelier. Bar manager John Harris just may be San Francisco's smoothest and savviest mixologist, with 40 years behind the plank, including long stints at the late, elegant Alexis at 1001 California on Nob Hill and venerable Original Joe's on Taylor. Louis Maldonado, 27, who spent the last year cooking at the French Laundry in Yountville, has taken over the stoves as head chef of the 58-seat



SUSIE BEHLER

The Majestic's Butterfly Bar has only seven stools, but its intimacy is its charm.

Cafe Majestic, which has been magnificently redesigned in traditional Federalist style and resembles a private dining room in Washington D.C. or Boston.

Unfortunately, the hotel's front-of-the-house service is not so majestic. Valet parking is offered at \$20 overnight for hotel guests and \$10 for restaurant guests, but finding the valet is no easy trick because he doubles as a bellman. The small front desk has a single receptionist and the welcoming spirit has been uneven in my last three or

four visits. It's sometimes warm and sometimes bush league. I've telephoned a few times and waited 20 rings for an answer, but the woman on the other end of the line was cheerful and apologetic for the delay.

Still, a creatively decorated, beautifully furnished historic guest room starting at \$150 a night in this town is a fair trade-off for a small staff.

Prediction: GM Birk has experience and a pedigree in high-end hotels — at the

TO PAGE 12 ▶

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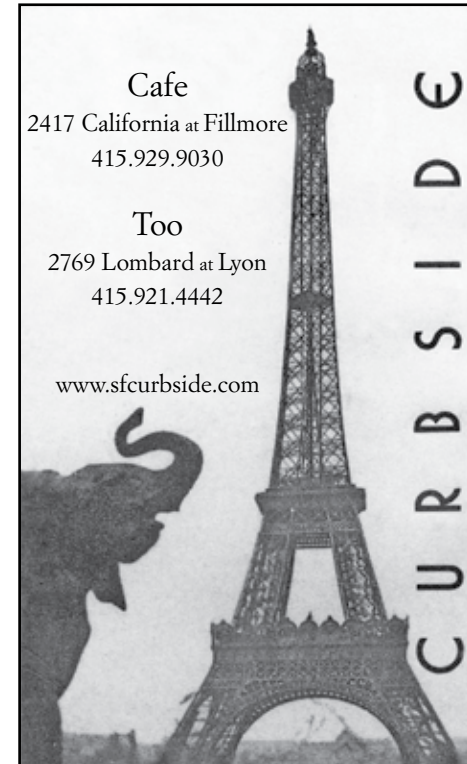
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A Taste of the South of France

Old School Bartending at Butterfly Bar

FROM PAGE 11 Fairmont and the Claremont — not to mention a whip-fast sense of humor. I'm confident the hotel team will soon be transformed to match what she's already done with the bar and the restaurant. Both have been rediscovered by the neighborhood and by some adventurous foodies.

The Majestic's Butterfly Bar has been a favorite oasis for years. Just off the high Victorian lobby, tucked behind tall frosted beveled glass doors, the compact mahogany and black granite bar has just seven barstools, with three small tables nearby. Its intimacy is its charm.

Named for the framed collection of 200 mounted butterflies of every species that adorns the walls — a donation from local lepidopterist Thomas William David — it opened as a thirst parlor in the 1930s after the repeal of Prohibition.

Lore has it the bar was an immediate hit — a tourist-free hideout and hangout for city powerbrokers who wanted privacy with their potables. Historians didn't record whether actresses and sisters Joan Fontaine and Olivia de Havilland, who lived quietly in the hotel during the '50s and early '60s, ever bellied up to the bar.

In the '70s, the Chronicle's iconic three-dot columnist, Herb Caen, and Hilton GM Henri Lewin and their pals and cronies



SUSIE BIEHLER

Bar manager John Harris just may be San Francisco's smoothest and savviest mixologist, with 40 years behind the plank.

were fixtures at the Majestic's bar. Over the years, lotharios and their lovers discovered it as one of the town's favored trysting bars, mainly because of its low profile and discreet location far from the meddling crowd. A check-in desk a few steps away and a key to a romantic room didn't diminish the libido or the excitement.

Today, bartender John Harris has revived the Butterfly Bar and is taking it to a new level of sophistication. Hired out of retirement by Birk and given a free hand to deploy his personalized and professional style of bartending, Harris has a knack for treating each patron like his only customer. That's old school mixology where excellent drinkmaking is only half the experience; graciousness and great conversation is equally important.

"Everyone who comes through that door is potentially my next best friend," says Harris. He presides over the bar's warm ambience as if he were welcoming guests into his home. The Butterfly Bar is comforting and actually looks larger than it is, thanks to tall mirrors behind the back bar. Seating is cozy but not cramped.

Harris makes a pledge: If a guest wants a particular liquor or a drink that requires a specific spirit he doesn't have, "I will find it for you," he says. These days, his repertoire includes about half a dozen specialty cocktails priced at \$12 each. The signature drink is the Majestic Martini, a marriage of Belvedere vodka and the rich raspberry flavor of Chambord blended with pineapple juice and finished with a dollop of champagne.

Harris is a practitioner of subtly flavored cocktails, but he will whip up Sex on

the Beach, Harvey Wallbangers or a lethal Long Island Iced Tea if pressed. When he makes, say, a vodka martini up, he pours a full four ounces of pricey but smooth Belvedere for \$11. He doesn't skimp on ingredients or quantities.

On these chilly days, Harris can warm up your innards with his hand-crafted Hot Buttered Rums. He combines brown sugar, grinds cloves, adds fresh cream butter and grates fresh cinnamon, \$12. Try his Hot Apple Pie, a mixture of fresh apple juice, Tuaca and heavy cream that is hand-shaken and topped with fresh nutmeg. All drinks are shaken or stirred in vintage art deco cocktail shakers that whisk you back to the age of the flappers and the bar's early days.

The Butterfly Bar also stocks a limited supply of premium beers and wines. The suds include Heineken, Sierra Nevada, San Francisco-brewed Anchor Steam, Fat Tyre and an India pale ale, all \$6 a bottle. Wines by the glass range from \$7 to \$17 for Napa's prized ZD Chardonnay.

While Cafe Majestic, just off the bar, offers innovative cuisine from the dashing chef Louis Maldonado, Harris has a civilized bar menu available until 10 nightly that will sate any hunger. The list includes an Angus sirloin cheeseburger with fries, \$12; a cheese plate with honey and breads, \$15, and even a steak frites, \$24.

The triage of the Butterfly Bar, the Cafe Majestic and the seemingly sincere efforts to improve the hotel's hospitality may return the Majestic to its past glories as a drink, eat and make merry refuge and a classic and classy retreat for the neighborhood.

The Hotel Majestic is at 1500 Sutter Street. For more information, call 441-1280 or visit www.thehotelmajestic.com.

HOME & GARDEN



A FAMILY HOME IN THE CITY

Creating space for a growing family

By PAUL C. OKAMOTO

THE VIEW from Alamo Square, with its colorful Victorian facades, is classic San Francisco. But actually living in the historic homes on the postcards is another story.

These homes were designed in more frugal times, when the average household had fewer belongings and made do with fewer bedrooms and bathrooms, less heat and light, and little more than a single coat closet.

Today's families want more than the rabbit warren of small spaces that make up the average Victorian flat. Many want master bedroom suites, separate bedrooms for their children, multi-car garages, home offices, game rooms, extra bathrooms and front and back yards. Those



GEOFF STURM

A dark one-bedroom unit was transformed into a light and elegant two-story flat merging indoor and outdoor spaces.

who choose to stay in San Francisco rather than move to the suburbs have to get creative, usually with the help of an architect and contractor, to fit modern conveniences and add elbow room into apartments that average less than 1,000 square feet on city lots usually no more than 25 feet wide.

My firm, Okamoto-Saijo Architecture, worked with one Alamo Square family to address these design challenges, get the approval of neighbors and navigate the regulations imposed through the city's planning, building and fire departments.

Our clients wished to transform a dark, one-bedroom, lower unit into a light, elegant two-story unit with three bedrooms, two bathrooms and direct access to outdoor

living spaces. They were going to have their first child and needed more space and additional bedrooms. And they wanted a safe, clean, modern kitchen open to the adjacent living and dining areas for family-friendly activities.

They also hoped the remodel could bring more natural light into their ground floor apartment at the back of a four-story apartment building. And they wanted direct access to the rear yard where there was none.

To help meet all these goals, it made sense to design a new floor in an unused portion of the basement. Our final design nearly doubled the size of the apartment, creating a total of 1,450 square feet.

Once we established the schematic design, the next step was to get planning approval and a building permit.

TO PAGE 15 ▶

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The end of 2008 presented financial challenges for many individuals and families around the world, in our country, and in our own state and community. The City of San Francisco seems to have been spared some of this financial hardship, but the anxiety caused by the collapse of so many of our institutions is palatable.

At times like these giving to others is more important than ever. Ironically, at times like these giving becomes more difficult for many. We at Hill & Co. recognize our good fortune. We represent extraordinary clients, and market extraordinary properties in one of the world's most extraordinary cities.

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3047 Fillmore St #B	1	1	1		25-Nov	599,000	599,000
2200 Pacific Ave #10E	1	2	1	1323	10-Dec	652,900	685,000
2171 Sacramento St #1	2	1	1		12-Dec	729,000	725,000
2121 Laguna St #6	2	2	1	870	9-Dec	749,000	730,000
2829 Steiner St #1	1	1	1		8-Dec	879,000	825,000
2040 Laguna St #401	3	3	2		21-Nov	1,225,000	1,200,000
2138 Vallejo St	2			1857	4-Dec	1,299,000	1,230,000
2947 Jackson St	3	2	1	2100	25-Nov	1,495,000	1,435,000
2829 Steiner St #2	2	2.5	1		8-Dec	1,595,000	1,575,000
1968 Greenwich St	3	2.5	2	2418	21-Nov	1,800,000	1,750,000
2829 Steiner St #3	2	2	1		8-Dec	1,995,000	1,995,000
2127 Broadway #3	3	3.5	2		4-Dec	3,900,000	3,900,000



Things have slowed down here, too

There have been far fewer transactions than usual in the neighborhood during the last month. A slowdown is normal during the holidays, but this year there were half the number of closings as last year. While that's not a big surprise in light of the current financial situation, it is somewhat surprising to see such a significant impact in our neighborhood.

The high end has been especially quiet during the past month: Only four properties have closed at or above \$3 million. There are two different stories regarding these closings.

■ First story: The original list price for 2736 Broderick was \$3.625 million, and 3470 Clay first came on at just under \$5 million. Both homes were on the market for a longer period of time, underwent significant price reductions and closed significantly below their initial asking prices.

■ Second story: 27 Raycliff Terrace (above) and 2127 Broadway #3 were both on the market less than a week before going into contract. Broadway closed at the initial asking price; the Raycliff Terrace price was not disclosed. With 20 properties listed and several more available as "pocket listings" not published on the multiple listing service, there is currently well over a year's supply of inventory at the upper end.

NEW ON THE MARKET: A good number of condos and tenancies-in-common have recently been listed, which is a little unusual for this time of year. Then again, these are unusual times. 1775 Broadway #2 is a studio condo with no parking listed at \$399,000. It features hardwood floors and a large walk-in closet, and the price makes it an ideal entry level home for the neighborhood. 3132 Washington is a recently remodeled 2-bedroom, 1-bath TIC in a six-unit building, with parking, priced at \$625,000. Finally, there is a very large 4-bedroom, 2.5-bath condo with parking for two cars at 1640 Broderick. It has not been updated, but at 3,841 square feet, the \$311 cost per foot is very attractive.

— Data and commentary provided by JOHN FITZGERALD, a partner at the Byzantium Brokerage and an agent at Pacific Union. Contact him at jfitzgerald@pacunion.com or call 345-3034.

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An Indoor Outdoor City Home

► FROM PAGE 13

Complying with the city planning code presented several challenges, especially in determining how far to extend the new lower level into the rear yard. Our research revealed that we could extend the new living space 12 feet into the backyard and still meet the minimum rear yard setback requirements.

As a next step, we organized meetings with our client's neighbors. Even for remodeling projects that meet the planning code, neighbors must be notified of all residential additions in San Francisco. They have 30 days to respond with any concerns. One neighbor wanted to be sure the extension did not create too much shadow in his yard. We assured him the addition would be set back five feet from each side. Because there was no neighborhood objection to our project, city planners approved the project at the close of the 30-day notification period.

Gaining approval from the building and fire departments was another matter. Since the apartment building had an existing fire escape on the rear facade, the addition had to include a landing for the fire escape and then provide access to a new stair from the roof deck down to the rear yard. Most controversial was whether the fire department would require a new alley or hallway connecting the street to the rear yard, which



REMODELING?

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A stairway leads from the deck to the back yard.

would have taken significant space in the new lower level of the unit. A pre-application meeting confirmed that there were already two means of egress throughout the apartment building.

Several construction challenges remained because of San Francisco's tight urban lots. We had to give careful consideration to the most optimal locations for new windows to add natural light and ventilation. Another challenge was the excavation for the new basement level, which had to be dug out entirely by hand.

To keep the building standing as we dug under it, we added an array of structural improvements, including concrete retaining walls, shear walls, composite lumber beams and steel channels added to existing wood beams.

Construction cost for the entire project was less than \$300,000, and the owners saved money by undertaking some of the interior finish work themselves.

Our clients moved in two months after their daughter was born. Their new ground floor apartment has all of the modern living conveniences and comfortably fits a family of three on two levels.

Upstairs they enjoy a great room with enlarged openings between the living, dining and kitchen areas, plus a new deck over the lower level addition. Their contemporary kitchen cabinets complement the old Victorian woodwork. Downstairs, they enjoy a more minimal look with a playful composition of windows and openings that frame the garden view outside. The deck's cable guardrails give a feel of openness to the rear garden, alternating with solid wall

sections to provide some sense of privacy.

The proof of the project's success is in the play of daylight that enters both levels of the apartment from dawn till dusk and in the feeling of serenity that comes from the visual connection to the rear garden.

"I am continually amazed at the closeness we feel to the yard and the natural world outside," says owner Egon Terplan. "When we're downstairs, we practically feel like we are in the garden itself because we have windows on three sides. And having a second level is heaven. It gives us much more freedom and flexibility when we are home."

Contrary to the stereotype, this project confirms that it is possible to create pleasant and comfortable housing for today's families in the heart of San Francisco.



The lights are on in San Francisco real estate.

Day after day, we're inundated with headlines about the market. It's great to know that San Francisco doesn't fall into these generalizations. As a city of neighborhoods, our market is like our climate; it varies from one neighborhood to the next and changes constantly. With 30 years of experience in San Francisco, and offices throughout the City, our seasoned professionals are here with a fresh perspective to guide you through the challenges and rewards that lie ahead.

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