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begins a new era

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THE NEW FILLMORE

SAN FRANCISCO ■ JANUARY 2013



Watercolorist Michael Reardon imagines how Alta Plaza Park might look had Alma Spreckels succeeded in building the Palace of the Legion of Honor there, as she originally planned.

A Museum in Alta Plaza?

No Dream Was Too Big for Big Alma

ALMA SPRECKELS, who willed the Legion of Honor museum into existence and donated many of its treasures, was a big woman with big ideas.

The colorful story of her voluble life is told in *Big Alma*, a biography by Bernice Scharlach published in 1990 and still available at the museum bookstore.

"It's an absolutely terrific story and it's well told," said James Heig, whose Scott-wall Associates published the biography. "As soon as I read it, I knew I wanted to publish it."

Heig said the biographer was initially encouraged by the Spreckels family to write

TO PAGE 2 ►



A portrait of Alma de Bretteville Spreckels painted by Sir John Lavery in 1932 is featured on the cover of *Big Alma*, now in its sixth printing.

FIRST she persuaded sugar magnate Adolph Spreckels to marry her and build as their home a spectacular Beaux-Arts mansion facing Lafayette Park. **THEN** came an even more ambitious project: a museum that would celebrate the glory of French art and architecture and showcase her collection of sculpture by Auguste Rodin in a replica of the Legion of Honor in Paris. **AND** Alma Spreckels had in mind the perfect place to build it: at the top of Alta Plaza Park.

"BIG ALMA'S MUSEUM" | PAGE 13

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We welcome new voices this year with the ability to tell interesting stories about faces and places in the neighborhood. Email ideas to editors@newfillmore.com.

THE NEW FILLMORE

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COVER ARTIST



"St. Dominic's," by Michael Reardon

WHAT IS & MIGHT HAVE BEEN

THE IDEA of a museum in the middle of Alta Plaza Park — one of the neighborhood's great green spaces — seems preposterous today. But everyone thought it was a splendid idea when Alma Spreckels proposed it and put up the money to build it in 1920.

Research turned up only a couple of newspaper clippings about the initial plan to build the Legion of Honor atop Alta Plaza. Neither the museum nor historical repositories had drawings — if any were ever made.

Enter Michael Reardon, one of the country's top architectural artists, who has a special fondness for Alta Plaza Park, and

has painted *en plein air* and led painting groups there. Reardon is also an acclaimed watercolorist whose paintings — some of local landmarks such as St. Dominic's Church — are exhibited in the neighborhood at the Thomas Reynolds Gallery at Pine and Fillmore.

Reardon imagined how the park and museum might look, and the result appears on the cover this month.

"As an architectural artist, I've drawn many projects that were never built," Reardon says. "But it's always rewarding to capture a great design in a magnificent setting. So, using perspective and watercolor, here is what might have been."

'Big Alma' Tells a Colorful Local Story

► FROM PAGE ONE

the book — until they read a few chapters. Alma's grandson John Rosekrans's wife, socialite and fashionista Dodie Rosekrans, was especially indignant.

"She was very cold," Heig recalled. "But John was very warm."

In the book, Scharlach acknowledges the openness of many family members about Alma's bumptious life — especially her daughter Dorothy Munn's "willingness to share family secrets no matter how painful."

Scharlach traveled widely as she followed Alma's international trail, which repeatedly led to Paris.

"She did a really first-rate job of research," Heig said. "It's a solid piece of work."

He gave an editor's highest praise to his writer, who was an experienced journalist.

"Amateur authors don't like to be edited," Heig said. "Professional authors know the value of a good editor."

Heig has edited and published many books on Bay Area historical topics, none more acclaimed than *Big Alma*, which he called "an intense local success."

He said the Legion of Honor leadership is committed to keeping the book in print, and naturally he is pleased.

"Alma would have liked it," he said. "It's a really important book for San Franciscans — and it would make an awfully good movie."

THE NEW FILLMORE

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STREET TALK

The '50s are over at Johnny Rockets

Its cheerful and hard-working employees got the word two days before the new year: January 4 is the final day for a burger and a chocolate shake at the counter at JOHNNY ROCKETS. The retro diner at Fillmore & Pine is now merely old-fashioned and out of time, with its fried food, juke box and neon signs — especially since ROAM BURGERS opened across the street. Look for a teriyaki restaurant to open in the prominent corner spot in the spring.

■ **A BOOKSTORE OPENS:** Here's man-bites-dog news in an era when bookstores are mostly closing: A new one has opened in Japantown. In December FOREST BOOKS moved to 1748 Buchanan Street from its longtime home on 16th Street, driven out by rising rents in the oh-so-hip Mission District.

■ **JAZZ NOTES:** Shortly after celebrating its fifth anniversary, VOSH'S filed for bankruptcy. But it's strictly a financial reorganization, said a spokesman, and neither club nor restaurant is closing. "God, no — no, no, no," she said. ... And soon there'll be jazz nearby at 1000 Van Ness Avenue when the RRAZZ ROOM moves to its new home.

■ **UNDER THE DOME:** The Fillmore will have one of its own in City Hall in the new year. Newly elected District 5 supervisor LONDON BREED will be sworn in January 8 at 10 a.m. in the south light court of City Hall. A reception in the neighborhood will follow at 6 p.m. at the African American Art & Culture Complex at 762 Fulton Street, which Breed has headed in recent years and turned into a thriving institution.

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

Jet Mail Is Flying South to Sutter

Packaging store and 300 others are getting a new address in the new year

By DONNA GILLESPIE

FILLMORE STREET this month will lose a landmark, a warm and friendly neighborhood destination that still offers meticulous, old-fashioned mailing services — a place that's so much more than just somewhere to mail a box.

After 22 years, Jet Mail is moving. The good news is that it's not going very far. January 31 will be Jet Mail's last day at 2130 Fillmore Street. But on the next day, at 8 a.m. on February 1, the shop will reopen five blocks away — at 2184 Sutter Street, near Pierce.

Owner Ed Tinsley says the move was prompted by rapidly rising rents.

"The rent is too high right now, and it will soon go up," says Tinsley. "We needed to find a place where the rent was more manageable that allows us to survive as a business."

The Fillmore Street location has been home to the business since 1990, and Tinsley says it will not be easy to let it go. About 300 individuals and businesses rent mailboxes there — and countless others use its notary and packing and mailing services and purchase shipping supplies, as well as incidentals such as wrapping paper, gift boxes and greeting cards.

Tinsley says he's enjoyed being at the heart of the action on Fillmore. He can't step out the door without getting caught up in conversation with old friends, and he



Kevin Wolohan and Ed Tinsley are moving their small-town post office to 2184 Sutter.

knows all the business owners on the street — and rents mailboxes to quite a few of them, past and present.

The new location does offer some advantages. It's in a less-crowded, slower-paced part of the neighborhood, and has easier parking. Tinsley says, somewhat hopefully, that the move shouldn't pose too much of an inconvenience.

"It's really not very far away — just five minutes, and that's on foot," he says.

"Our customers are very loyal," Tinsley says, "and they really like our service. Very few people have indicated the new location wouldn't be suitable for them." He also hopes the presence of Jet Mail will enliven these quieter blocks and that eventually other businesses will follow.

Jet Mail's hours in the new location will be the same: Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., and on Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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CRIME WATCH

Vehicle Burglary, Possession of Burglary Tools, Delaying a Police Officer Steiner and Post Streets November 27, 4:08 a.m.

From his apartment window, a witness observed a man in the street below break the window of a white car and called police. When arriving officers illuminated the car with their spotlight, a man who matched the description given sprang up from behind the vehicle and walked away. As an officer followed the suspect, he ran. The officer caught him and attempted to place him in handcuffs, but the man swung his fists. The officer was struck several times, but eventually took the man to the ground and handcuffed him. Other officers located the owner of the car, who identified the items taken from his vehicle. The suspect was transported to Northern Station.

Stolen Vehicle Van Ness Avenue and Pine Street November 28, 12:15 p.m.

Officers spotted a car similar to one used in an armed robbery the day before. The driver appeared to become extremely nervous when he saw the patrol car. A computer check revealed the car was stolen. The driver claimed his friend had let him borrow the car, and that he was just going to get some gas before returning it. The vehicle's owner said he had not given anyone permission to drive his car. Police found illegal fireworks and other stolen property inside it. The suspect was booked at Northern Station.

Burglary, Resisting Arrest Van Ness and Daniel Burnham Court November 30, 6 p.m.

A man walked into a cell phone store, cut a security wire and took an iPhone 5 from the display. He then dodged his way past an employee who was trying to stop him and fled out the front door. Assisting officers chased the man and caught him several blocks away. In his pocket, officers found the iPhone with the security plate and wire still attached. Store employees identified the suspect and gave the police the store's video of the theft. The suspect was booked at Northern Station.

Collision Hit and Run, Reckless Driving Geary Boulevard and Broderick Street November 27, 4:41 p.m.

Officers in a patrol car stopped at an intersection saw a car speed past them. The car then swerved, made a wide, sweeping turn and continued in the opposite direction, moving erratically. When officers turned around to stop the car, the fleeing vehicle began making sudden turns and accelerating. They lost the car once, but a bystander pointed out its direction of travel. Another witness reported the car had earlier struck down a motorcycle, then hit another car and sped off without stopping. Eventually the officers located the car; it was occupied by two men. Assisting officers canvassed the area for the fallen motorcyclist, who identified the car that knocked him down. The driver was booked on multiple charges and taken to Northern Station.

Unlawful Entry, Carrying a Concealed Weapon Pacific Avenue and Webster Street December 3, 2:03 p.m.

Officers received a call about a man using a crowbar to break into an apartment. The intruder took a UPS package and fled. The witness gave the police a description of the suspect and his direction of travel. The building manager also saw the man leaving

■ POLICE

Northern Station gets a new captain

Greg McEachern, a fourth generation San Franciscan who attended the neighborhood's Sacred Heart High School and is a 22-year veteran of the San Francisco Police Department, took over as captain of Northern Station on Fillmore Street on December 22.

In his decades on the force, McEachern has served as an officer, sergeant and lieutenant at several different stations around the city. His most recent assignments include a stint in 2010 as manager of the department's crime lab, which was then embroiled in a scandal alleging that a lab worker pilfered cocaine for her own use.

McEachern then became captain of Southern Station, which encompasses the evolving South of Market neighborhood, where the historically high number of burglaries and robberies dropped, partly due to his innovative work with a robbery abatement team that focused on area nightclubs.

Since May 2011 McEachern has served as commanding officer of the risk management division, which investigates officer shootings and misconduct.

McEachern replaces Ann Mannix, who served as captain of the Northern District for three years before being reassigned to the police force's tactical company.

the building and confronted him, demanding to see the package since he did not recognize the man as a tenant. The manager recovered the package, but the suspect fled. Officers gave chase and detained him. In a pat search, they found he was carrying a large pair of pliers, bolt cutters and a collapsible baton. They transported him to Northern Station.

Vehicle Burglary Geary Boulevard and Van Ness Avenue December 8, 1:15 a.m.

A man sitting in a bar looked out the window to check on his car and saw a man inside, rifling through items in the back seat. The man ran outside and confronted the suspect, who attempted to get away; the car's owner punched him and held him down, then called the police and waited for them to arrive. The suspect told the police he had been looking for his friend's keys inside the car, but must have had the wrong Mercedes. The officers booked the suspect at Northern Station.

Theft from Person, Terrorist Threats Geary Boulevard and Fillmore Street December 15, 2:59 p.m.

A woman was riding the bus with her boyfriend when two men jumped from their seats as the rear doors opened and snatched her iPhone out of her hands, then quickly got off the bus and ran. The woman's boyfriend leaped off the bus and ran after them, shouting "Stop them" to the crowd of bystanders and announcing they had snatched a phone. When the man in pursuit almost had one of the suspects cornered, the suspect dropped the iPhone and reached toward his belt, saying, "I'm going to kill you. Let me go or I'll mess you up." The crowd shouted to the man in pursuit, "You got your phone back; let them go." Police responding to a call about a foot chase found and detained both suspects, who were booked at Northern Station.

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Visit sfmta.com/freemuni4youth or contact 311 for details and application

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FOOD & DRINK

By CHRIS BARNETT

IF YOU NEED a new hideout with plenty of space to chill over a hot coffee, feast on fresh, fairly priced food and connect with fast, free WiFi — without your train of thought being derailed by a room full of chatterboxes — the recently opened Fillmore Fine Foods Cafe could be the haunt you've hunted.

For a side street cafe, the place at 181 Sutter, just off Fillmore, is huge and airy. For two decades, it was Fillmore Fine Foods, Fred and Jeannette Dugman's corner grocery in the middle of block.

"Fred said he worked virtually every day for 20 years and now I'm working every day," says Tariq Zawaideh, the 24-year-old owner, who's making his first foray into the neighborhood cafe business. Previously he was a piercer in a tattoo parlor in town. Now Zawaideh has redeployed his artistic talents to his new venture and says he's thrilled to be his own boss and barista.



Tariq Zawaideh keeps things moving at the new Fillmore Fine Foods Cafe at 181 Sutter.

Once a Corner Grocery, Now a Neighborhood Cafe

Walk in and immediately to the right is a cozy sofa, with three easy chairs and a coffee table, all made of rattan. There's a conversational grouping with a view out the window and abstract art by a local artist on the walls. Simple tables and chairs occupy the rest of the space under a high ceiling.

To compete in this food-conscious neighborhood, Zawaideh is walking the fine line between reasonable prices and generous portions cooked from scratch. A 12-oz. coffee is \$1.50, probably the best deal in the area. Lattes start at \$2.75. Dou-

ble espresso at \$2.50 is the most popular, says the proprietor, who's assisted by his brother Randy.

The ambitious breakfast, lunch and dinner menu covers practically an entire wall. The hot sellers so far are the falafel wrap at \$5.95, the fresh roasted turkey sandwich at \$7.25 and the club sandwich packed with turkey, bacon, ham, tomato, red onion and

avocado at \$6.75. A bowl of fresh fruit is \$5.25.

Says Zawaideh: "Our 'omigod' salads are a specialty because we serve them in deep oversized bowls." For \$6.95, the big bowls can come filled with a chicken Caesar salad, an apple chicken salad or a half dozen others. Open face bagels and English muffins piled high with you-name-it start

at \$2.50. Breakfast items are served all day.

The cafe is still a work in progress. Zawaideh says he hasn't perfected his dessert menu yet, but a dessert crepe will debut soon. His website isn't up yet and he's still waiting for his beer and wine license. A big screen TV is on its way, but he vows the decibel count will be easy on the ears.

Meanwhile, his customers aren't complaining. William Ransom, a computer security specialist from London, was munching on the sizeable turkey sandwich and working on his laptop, which was plugged into one of the cafe's many wall outlets. "I almost went into Starbucks, but it was too crowded," said Ransom. "Here I got right on the Internet without a problem and the sandwich is very good."

A newly minted regular has become a fan. "You don't get this kind of menu anywhere else on Fillmore, especially at these prices," says Mike Fedor, a technology executive with Blue Shield who lives directly across the street from the cafe. He should know. Fedor took a three-year break from health care and ran a coffeehouse in the upper Polk neighborhood.

There's a microwave in the food prep area behind the counter at Fillmore Fine Foods Cafe, but Zawaideh insists it's for personal use only.

"I never use the microwave for anything on the menu, only when I need to heat up food from the outside for my own dinner," he says. "I'm here every day from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. and I've eaten everything on my own menu at least twice or three times. So I order takeout from other restaurants."

RETAIL REPORT

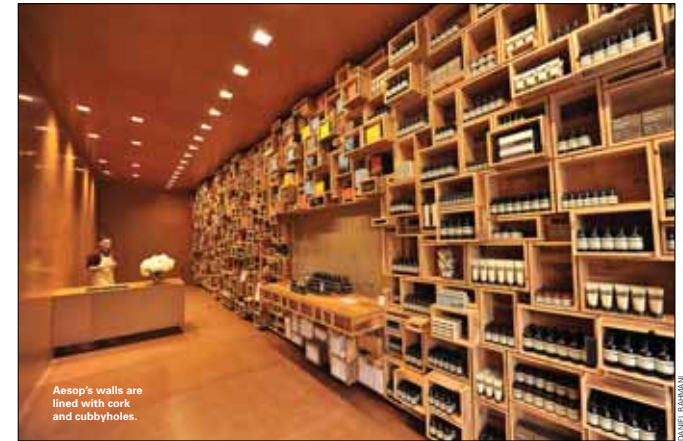


More corporate labels are coming

Fillmore continues to be the location of choice for corporate labels branching out from department stores to freestanding boutiques. At 2050 Fillmore, for decades the home of Mrs. Dewson's Hats, NARS brings another cosmetics line to the street. At 2116 Fillmore, JOIE will bring its fashions for women to the neighborhood.



NEW NEIGHBORS



Aesop's walls are lined with cork and cubbyholes.

Aesop Brings More Body Care Products to Fillmore

NEWLY OPENED at 2450 Fillmore: the first San Francisco store for Aesop, which boasts body care products by an Australian company.

The offerings are extensive and mostly botanically based. They include face cleansers, exfoliants, masques and moisturizers for various skin types, along with a line of skin care products based on parsley seed extracts, hair care products and a couple of

fragrances. There's even a shampoo concocted of lemon rind, tea tree and spearmint leaves for cats and dogs.

Aesop has burgeoned to more than 50 stores internationally since its founding in 1987 — each spot said to be designed to reflect its locale. Here that means cork.

As part of its packaging, Aesop's offers a cheeky A to Z list of San Francisco that includes some of the wonders of the city

from the Asian Art Museum to Zuni Cafe — with Rooky Ricardo's Records on Haight, owned by Dick Vivian, former host at the Elite Cafe, bringing up the middle.

And in keeping with nearly everyone's resolutions for the new year, the company urges using its products "as art of a balanced life that includes a healthy diet, sensible exercise, a moderate intake of red wine — and a regular dose of good books."



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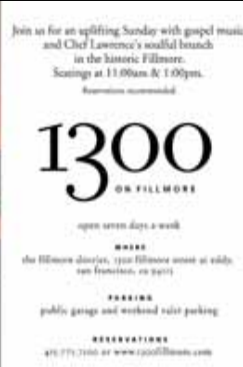
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ART

'The Rose' Returns

Masterpiece now at SFMOMA was created on Fillmore

By JEROME TARSHIS

YOUTHFUL ASPIRATION, ambivalence toward conventional art world success and a pitifully low budget came together for artists Bruce Conner and Jay DeFeo in the history of her masterpiece, "The Rose."

DeFeo worked on the painting for eight years in her apartment at 2322 Fillmore Street, a four-unit apartment house between Clay and Washington. The building — still standing — was home to a small pantheon of artistic San Franciscans. In addition to poet Michael McClure and his wife, Joanna, its tenants included at various times the artist-couples William and Joan Brown, Sonia Gechtoff and James Kelly, and Jay DeFeo and Wally Hedrick.

DeFeo and Hedrick gave outstanding parties — they seemed to exemplify living everyday life as a work of art — and their studio became a popular destination for visiting writers, artists, collectors and curators.

For much of the time they lived on Fillmore, DeFeo was working on "The Rose," building up layer upon layer of paint to a thickness of eight inches. By the time she stopped working on it, in 1965, it weighed a ton and its future was compromised by the fact that its paint was so heavy that the painting was pulling itself apart.

Bruce Conner, who lived nearby at 2365 Jackson Street, said that DeFeo's potentially endless reworking of "The Rose" needed

"an uncontrolled event to make it stop." The Pasadena Art Museum had asked to exhibit the painting, but DeFeo put off letting it go. The eviction of Hedrick and DeFeo from 2322 Fillmore provided the nudge; it was necessary to move "The Rose" somewhere, and circumstances dictated Pasadena.

On November 9, 1965, a crew from Bekins Van and Storage removed "The Rose" through an opening sawed into the front wall of DeFeo's studio and lowered it to a flatbed truck. That was not the end of what came to seem an obsessive effort; DeFeo worked on the painting for three more months in Pasadena before curator Walter Hopps could persuade her that she had done enough.

Conner filmed the painting's departure from Fillmore Street, exposing 700 feet of film over a period of two days. In 1967 he released the seven-minute final version, with a sound track from Miles Davis's *Sketches of Spain*. Its title was *The White Rose: Jay DeFeo's Painting Removed by Angelic Hosts*. In their white coveralls the movers seemed to radiate light, much as the painting itself seemed to do.

Conner's involvement did not stop with the film. Although the painting was an art world legend, and in 1959 any of a number of American museums would have loved to acquire it, by 1967 both DeFeo and "The Rose" had fallen off the radar.

Conner appointed himself DeFeo's "manager" and over a period of more than 20 years participated, with other DeFeo



■ ON VIEW

"The Rose" is the centerpiece of "JAY DEFeO: A RETROSPECTIVE" at the Museum of Modern Art through February 3. In this 1960 photograph, DeFeo works on the celebrated painting in the bay window of her apartment at 2322 Fillmore.

admirers, in an often frustrating effort to find a museum that would acquire the painting and pay for the needed restoration. Until that happened, "The Rose" remained entombed in plaster behind a wall at the San Francisco Art Institute. DeFeo died in 1989, at the age of 60, her death arguably hastened by the unremitting work, heavy drinking and intense exposure to paint fumes that went into the creation of "The Rose."

In 1995 the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York signed an agreement to acquire the painting if it could be successfully stabilized. The following year "The Rose" was exhibited for the first time since 1969. It has since taken its place

as a viewable artwork rather than a hidden-away object of legend.

Thomas Hoving, former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, included *The Rose* in his book *Greatest Works of Art of Western Civilization*. He describes it as "perhaps the single most expressive painting of the 1960s."

During the many years "The Rose" lay hidden from view, Conner's beautiful, elegiac film was the only form in which this masterpiece of American painting could be seen by the public. It remains a tribute to the friendship between two artists — and to a time when Fillmore Street was a center of avant-garde creativity.

Fillmore Was Home to an Eclectic Group of Painters and Poets

By MICHAEL SCHWAGER

THE HISTORY of Bay Area art is filled with stories of unique individuals, influential institutions and the social and political climate where artists congregated to live and create. An exhibition now at the Di Rosa Foundation in Napa tells one of those stories: the story of an exceptional group of artists in a particular San Francisco neighborhood during an especially vibrant period.

Most of the artists in "Renaissance on Fillmore, 1955-65" were relatively unknown in the mid-1950s — a transitional moment in the art world when abstract painting gave way to assemblage sculpture and both were influenced by poetry and music. Today these same artists form the foundation of modern art in Northern California and helped shape the future of American art. Their work remains remarkably vital and opens a window on the era during which it was created.

While North Beach flourished as a creative district, the Fillmore — in particular the northern portion referred to as the Upper Fillmore — was an equally important, if less publicized, locus of creative ferment and home to a remarkable and eclectic group of painters and poets. Many of these artists were affiliated, as students or faculty, with the California School of Fine Arts, now the San Francisco Art Institute.

The apartment building at 2322-2330 Fillmore was the nucleus of an artistic renaissance due to its residents and the activities that took place there. The unassuming white stucco and wood two-story structure near the corner of Washington and Fillmore contained four flats. It also had a modest backyard and even a plywood roof deck. The flats



■ ON VIEW

The apartment building at 2322-2330 Fillmore is the focus of "RENAISSANCE ON FILLMORE: 1955-65," which continues at the Di Rosa Foundation in Napa through January 27. For more information, visit dirosaart.org. The cover of the catalog features a 1965 photograph of Jay DeFeo's painting "The Rose" being removed from her apartment through an opening cut into the front of the building.

were large — seven rooms with 14-foot ceilings — and the rents small: a now-unbelievable \$65 a month.

Even a partial list of the occupants from the mid 1950s through 1965 — when the building was sold and many of the artists were evicted — reads like a Who's Who of Bay Area Beat Art and explains the building's nickname, "Painterland":

- artist and filmmaker Paul Beattie and his wife Dee, who were there around 1955 and 1956
- newlywed painters Joan and William H. Brown
- Bruce and Jean Conner, who shared lodgings with the poet Michael McClure and his wife Joanna briefly in

1957 before moving to their own place a block away on Jackson Street

■ Jay DeFeo and Wally Hedrick, likely the building's longest-tenured residents and its creative heart, who lived next door to the Browns and were introduced to the building by Beattie, taking his flat when he left

■ Craig Kauffman, better known as an L.A. artist but who lived for a time in the flat of Jim Newman, founder of the Dilexi Gallery

■ husband-and-wife Abstract Expressionist painters James Kelly and Sonia Gechtoff, who left Fillmore for New York around 1959

■ the painter and musician Dave Getz, a resident between 1962 and 1964

■ painter Les Kerr, who along with his wife, documentary filmmaker Mary Kerr and their son and daughter, lived there about the same time

■ Ed Moses, another artist identified with Southern California, who, with his wife Avilda, took over Newman's place around 1960.

Poet Jack Foley described 2322-2330 Fillmore as "inexpensive so artists could afford it, and when artists moved in and did their art and moved out again, they told other artists about it." The sheer number — and talent — of the resident artists, poets and musicians transformed a "tenement building" into the place in the upper Fillmore to paint, write, play, critique, argue and party. In a 1998 interview, Hedrick recalled that "the building sort of vibrated with all of these mixed personalities... the poets came over a lot and there was a lot of bongo and chanting and sort of spontaneous musical drumming... there was a party about every weekend."

Looking back on this unique place in the history of San Francisco art, it's easy to get caught up in nostalgia for a time when the creativity, spontaneity and freedom with which these artists lived and worked seemed eminently more possible — and affordable. Yet looking at the art they created, now more than 50 years later, it is not nostalgia we're filled with, but a deep and abiding respect for the beauty and power these works still exude.

Excerpted from the catalog for "Renaissance on Fillmore: 1955-65," curated by Michael Schwager.

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MOLLIE STONE'S

In the Castro In the Fillmore In Twin Peaks

'Mostly British Film Festival' Returns to the Vogue

JACK BAIR is one of the co-founders and co-directors of the "Mostly British Film Festival," which opens at the restored Vogue Theatre at 3290 Sacramento Street on January 17, running through January 24. Bair leads two lives, at least. His day job is as senior vice president and general counsel of the San Francisco Giants — a team that had a good year. With the festival celebrating its fifth anniversary, Bair says this also promises to be a good year for the "Mostly British Film Festival."

Working for a baseball team, how did you also become involved in saving old theatres and presenting a film festival? I first became involved in an effort to save the old Cinema 21 Theatre on Chestnut Street. I saw the theatre boarded up as I was walking back from a softball game at Moscone Field. My reaction was immediate: I had to do something. Fortunately, the effort was successful and gave life to the San Francisco Neighborhood Theater Foundation. The old Cinema 21 has been reincarnated as the Marina Theatre and is alive and well.

With the Bridge Theatre and Lumiere Theatre closing, there are very few neighborhood theatres left; the Clay on Fillmore is a surviving exception. We have approached the owners of the Bridge Theatre and made an offer to keep it open, so we hope there is still a chance to save it. Fortunately, there are still a few neighborhood theatres left. We own the historic Vogue Theatre on Sacramento Street. The Vogue just celebrated its 100th birthday



For the fifth year, the restored Vogue Theatre at 3290 Sacramento hosts the fest. Full details are at mostlybritish.org.

and is one of the oldest movie theatres in the world. We also took over the lease at the Balboa Theatre to keep it alive.

How have you managed to keep the Vogue Theatre going? We purchased the theatre in 2007 and operate it under the nonprofit organization and fundraiser each year to make improvements and pay the mortgage. Some months are better than others, but we are making it. We had a very successful fundraiser last month that will enable us to do some further improvements to the theatre. It is a constant work in progress.

The Vogue has some specialty programming other than straight first-run feature films. How does this fit into your business model? Our bread and butter are the first-run feature films, but we also want to establish an identity as a special community theatre. Programs such as the "Mostly British Film Festival" help put us on the map and help us celebrate the theatre and its place in San Francisco history. We like to have community events that differentiate us from the experience one might have at other theatres.

This is the fifth anniversary of the "Mostly British" festival. What do you have in store? We have 25 feature films from the United Kingdom, Australia, Ireland and South Africa — all at the Vogue. We are thrilled to have Minnie Driver join us on opening night for the screening of her film, *Hanky Panky*. The collection of movies should have wide appeal: British noir, England period pieces, classics, cult hits, documentaries, musicals, comedies — we've got it all. We have the Beatles, Clive Owen, James Mason, Elizabeth McGovern, Trevor Howard, Celia Johnson, Robert Carlyle and Felicity Jones, plus directors David Lean, Sidney Lumet, Ken Loach and Michael Apted. The festival is one of the most affordable in the city, with full festival passes selling at just \$100.

What films do you recommend? In addition to opening night, I recommend Friday's British Noir Night with two films starring James Mason: *Old Man Out* and *The Deadly Affair*. On Saturday, we're show-

ing *The Sapphires*, an energetic musical set in the Australian Outback featuring four sisters seeking a music career despite family objections. We're showing one of my favorite indie films, *Once*, on Sunday.

On Monday night we're showing the latest installment in the award-winning "Up" series, *56 Up*. This documentary has followed the same group of Brits from age 7 to age 56. *Backbeat* is a film about the early days of the Beatles and is referred to by *Entertainment Weekly* as "one of the best 50 movies you have never seen." After watching the Ben Affleck film *Argo*, I was interested in seeing *My Tehran for Sale*, a film showing some of the repression of modern day Iran. The whole line-up of films can be found at mostlybritish.org.

Several of the films are musicals. Is that a theme of this year's festival? We did make a conscious effort to include more fun, uplifting films in this year's lineup.

How does the neighborhood get involved in the festival? We're having the opening night party at the Jewish Community Center, a block away from the Vogue at 3200 California Street. We have food donated from local restaurants and encourage festivalgoers to patronize local establishments between films. Many volunteers from the neighborhood help put on the festival and get to watch the films, too.

Why "Mostly British?" We wanted to create special programming for the Vogue and this was a niche — foreign films in English.

Big Alma's Museum

First envisioned in Alta Plaza Park, the Legion of Honor then moved to Land's End

By BERNICE SCHARLACH

PATRIOTISM — pure American patriotism — was the way Alma de Bretteville Spreckels convinced her Teutonic husband to spend a million dollars for French culture.

Her goal was to introduce French art to America, and she knew her friend the Parisian dancer Loie Fuller's goal was to erect a shrine to Auguste Rodin, the great French sculptor. But she packaged those aims inside a red-white-and-blue flag.

The museum she proposed to build in San Francisco — the Palace of the Legion of Honor — would be a memorial to the California boys who gave their lives defending their country.

How fervently A.B. Spreckels bought the package is apparent in the statement he delivered to the Board of Park Commissioners when he made his formal offer at their meeting on January 5, 1920. He

declared it was the purpose of "my wife and myself to contribute to the beautification of our native city something not only beautiful in itself, but also something devoted to patriotic and useful ends: something which might be dedicated as a suitable memorial to our brave boys who gave their lives to their country in the Great War, and also lend itself, as a home of art and historical treasures, to promoting the education and culture of our citizens, and especially the rising and coming generations."

Along with his offer to build a museum, A.B. sent a check for \$320,000 "to be used for and to insure the completion of the building." He noted that "upon completion of the building it is the intention of Mrs. Spreckels to offer to you as a nucleus of the art treasures to be housed therein a valuable collection of sculptures and other works of art by famous artists."

The museum actually cost A.B. over a million dollars to build. That fact came out after his death when, in a codicil to his will dated September 12, 1923, he revoked a sum of money he had originally lent to John McLaren, Golden Gate Park superintendent, for the beautification of the park. Explaining his action, A.B. wrote, "I do this for the reason that the cost of construction of this memorial has far exceeded the original estimates made therefor, and I feel that the expenditure in excess of \$1 million is all that I should make for such a public purpose."

ALMA CHOSE ALTA PLAZA PARK, six blocks west of the Spreckels Mansion at 2080 Washington Street, as the original site for her museum. Shortly after A.B. made his formal presentation to the city, she described the site in a

letter to Loie Fuller as "the finest part of the residence district. People are saying, how did you ever think of such a splendid place? Adolph is crazy about it. He just loves it. People have telephoned, wired, written and personally thanked us."

"When it is finished," she vowed to Loie, "I will declare publicly all you have done for it. I would not be worthy of the name de Bretteville if I did not give justice where justice is due. . . . To a few, I have mentioned your part in it and they are so surprised. How can they expect me to have done what I did alone? People are so stupid. I am here in the West, 6,000 miles away where they do not realize the great importance of what Rodin and all means. However, I do it because my soul cries out to express itself and something in me loving art must come out."

"The site donated by the Park Commis-



The California Palace of the Legion of Honor the Spreckels gave the city was modeled after the Legion of Honor in Paris.

Six blocks west of her mansion on Lafayette Park, Alma Spreckels thought she had found an ideal location for her museum.

sioners is two square blocks on Jackson Street between Pierce and Scott. It is hilly in the back. I have chosen the exact spot with Apple-garth." George Applegarth, the architect who built 2080 Washington, had agreed to work with Henri Guillaume, the French architect who designed the original Legion of Honor in Paris, on which the museum was to be modeled. "It will be 100 feet back from the sidewalk. John McLaren, the park superintendent, loves Adolph and he is going to make the grounds around it beautiful. Also he is going to make the Court of Honor lovely, too."

"Adolph and I cabled Guillaume the news last week but we have not heard from him yet. Mr. Raphael Weill is crazy about it and has sent word to me several times offering to help. . . . Many other wealthy people have sent word offering to help."

Since one way of helping, to Alma's mind, was to purchase paintings for the museum, she continued: "Now, listen. What is Bar-thome's scheme about painting? Could he send the list and some stories about them? People naturally want to know what they are paying 200,000 francs for. Perhaps I can interest someone."

ALMA SHRUGGED OFF CRITICISM and ploughed ahead on her project. Diplomacy was to her just another word for pussyfooting around. You have to work as hard as you can to make something this tremendous come about. Being so far away, you have to send letters and cablegrams and keep after so many people, or else nothing would get done. This was costing her husband a great deal of money and Alma was going to see that the money wasn't wasted.

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Unlike S.F., French Society Adored Alma

► FROM PAGE 11

Even with her very limited business knowledge, Alma was aware that her husband could very comfortably afford such a magnificent gift. The vast scope of the empire owned jointly by J.D. and A.B. Spreckels, in addition to sugar companies in the U.S., Hawaii and the Philippines and the mighty Oceanic Steamship Company, also included investment companies. There were railroads and utilities; two daily newspapers in San Diego; hotels and resorts, including the Hotel del Coronado in San Diego; plus banks and real estate holdings.

A.B.'s wealth also included the princely profit he made in 1916 when he transferred his and Alma's interest in 640 acres of oil land in the McKittrick Hills district near Bakersfield to Standard Oil. His Tanforan Racetrack in Burlingame and the Tia Juana Racetrack, just across the border from San Diego, were both flourishing.

EARLY IN MAY 1920, FOUR MONTHS after A.B. announced his gift, Alma left for Paris to line up French support for the museum. She got it. Soon after her arrival, she was guest of honor of the French government at a reception in the salon of the Grand Palais, "in recognition of her services in behalf of French art, and the French cause during the war," accord-



The museum was eventually built at Inspiration Point in Lincoln Park and later expanded.

She worried the day might come when the museum would need to be enlarged. You couldn't do that at Alta Plaza Park.

ing to a newspaper account. The reception was attended by "members of Paris society, by high officials and distinguished artists."

Unlike San Francisco society, French society adored Alma. They found her bluntness disarming. If her manners were coarse, her wish to promote French culture in America was genuine. She so charmed her friend the duchess of Vendôme, France's highest-ranking noblewoman, that the duchess was moved to write a letter to A.B. about "dear and sweet Mrs. Spreckels," pledging to "help as much as I can with real enthusiasm for your museum, collecting works of art which will represent a little of our French soul and spirit."

When Alma returned home in August,

she reported jubilantly to the waiting press that "Gobelins tapestries donated by the French Republic and rooms furnished by royalty of Europe" would adorn the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, which she and her husband were erecting in Alta Plaza.

There was lots more, she reported excitedly. The French government promised to give a comprehensive collection of Sevres vases, and a large collection of war medals and ancient coins. The duchess of Vendôme pledged to furnish a room, to be called *La Salle de la Duchesse de Vendôme*, enlisting the aid of 50 of her friends among the old noblesse, each of whom would donate a work of art.

WHILE ALMA WAS ECSTATIC over the progress made in that visit, there was one thing she was not happy about: the location of the museum. Later that night, when she finally climbed into her green velvet canopied bed that kings had made love in, she worried that the day might come when there would be a need to enlarge the museum. You couldn't do that at Alta Plaza Park.

The next morning, she had A.B.'s chauffeur drive her around to all the parks in the city. The most beautiful one was Lincoln Park, and the ideal site within it was Inspiration Point.

Inspirational as that idea was, it offered what seemed to be insurmountable difficulties. Lincoln Park was the site of the city's only public golf course, and Inspiration Point was in the vicinity of the putting green for the 17th hole. Alma could anticipate the furor that was sure to erupt if that sacrosanct ground were disturbed.

Another problem was the remoteness of the site, referred to as Land's End. The city proper lay far to the east; the area was surrounded by sand dunes and there were no roads, except one in the Presidio, connecting it to the rest of the city.

Those difficulties provided just the kind of challenge Alma needed. Restrictions that applied to ordinary people did not apply to her. Predictably, when news got out about the new location of the museum, a howl went up among the city's golfers. Alma quieted them with the announcement that she had secured the services of a famous golf course architect, W. Herbert Fowler, who would redesign the 17th hole.

Excerpted from Big Alma: San Francisco's Alma Spreckels © 1990 Bernice Scharlach, published by Scribner Associates.

HOME & GARDEN

A GRAND DAME WITH A PAST

The sale of 2615 California brings out the buyers — as well as the history buffs

By KAREN HORTON

WHEN THE stately residence at 2615 California Street — a glorious white Victorian now divided into four living units — went on the market in the fall, it seemed as if nearly everyone in the neighborhood stopped by for a look during a weekend-long open house. In barely a month on the market, there were 13 offers on the table. It sold for \$3.1 million — \$1.1 million over the asking price.

The sale stirred up ample fodder for fans of historical detail beyond the usual wainscoting, Corinthian columns and soaring ceilings that mark historic Victorian homes in the neighborhood with similarly good bones. This house has historical minutiae up the grand staircase.

Around 1878, Minnie Selfridge, the wife of iron and steel magnate Edward Selfridge, commissioned a well-known architectural team of brothers to build a group of six houses along California Street between Pierce and Scott. The grandest would be completed at 2615 California in 1894.

The brothers were whiz kid Canadians, James and Merritt Reid, fresh from designing what was then the largest hotel

resort in the world: the Hotel del Coronado in San Diego. The California Street project would become their first residential commission in San Francisco. The brothers brought with them their obvious penchant for inspired classical revival, stamping 2615 with much of the wedding cake aura of their Coronado masterpiece.

The workaholic Reids' portfolio would eventually include the Cliff House, the Fairmont Hotel and the 1898 landmark San Francisco Call building on Market Street. The Call, later redubbed the Spreckels Building and now the Central Tower, at 15 stories was then the tallest building west of Chicago. It also boasted a magnificent baroque dome, demolished in the late 1930s and replaced with one of Art Deco design.

There would be more magnificent Reid mansions throughout the neighborhood, and even a few department stores on Market Street, including the Hale Brothers emporium. The busy Reids also found time to design 30 distinctive movie theaters throughout the Bay Area. The best known of those classic palaces is the Grand Lake Theater, built in 1926 and still operating in Oakland, complete with organ accompaniment.

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Designed by the Reid Brothers, then renovated by Julia Morgan, now 2615 California is undergoing a restoration.

Happy New Year San Francisco!



2012 proved to be a very good year for San Francisco real estate. This was true for both buyers and sellers, a balance that doesn't happen often. Property values climbed, and that of course was good for sellers. At the same time interest rates remained low, and that made

homes more affordable. Consequently, buyers could purchase larger homes in more desirable neighborhoods. Let's hope for more of the same in 2013! In the coming year, please don't hesitate to call us should you have any questions or needs in regard to your home or real estate.

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