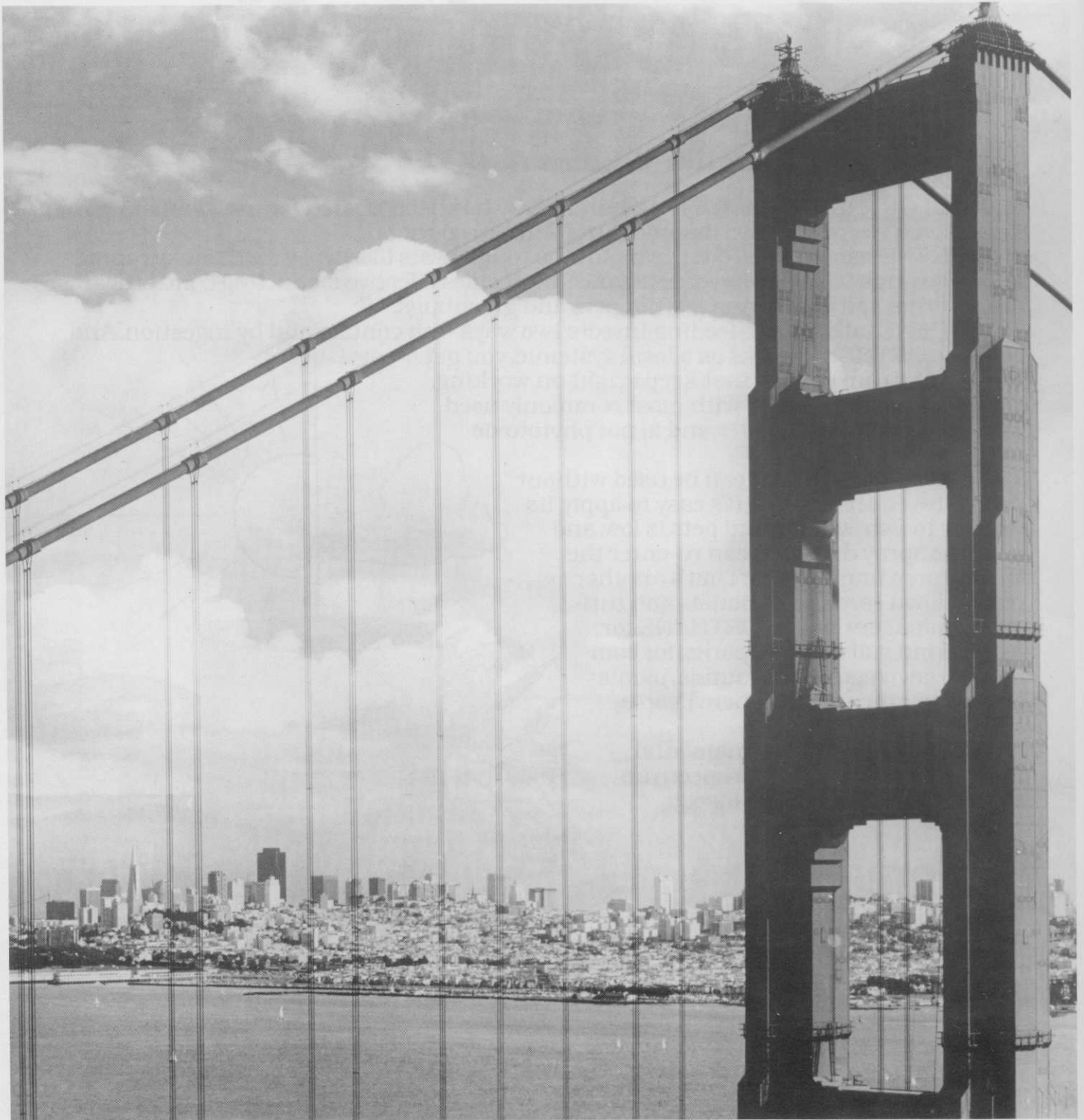


The Golden Handcuff

THE CITY, as all of us who grew up within a 500-mile radius call it, does get to you.

"You know what it is?" John Steinbeck said of San Francisco. "It's a golden handcuff with the key thrown away."



San Francisco skyline seen through the red-orange superstructure of the golden Gate Bridge. Highest rises are the new Transamerica Corporation pyramid and the monolithic black marble Bank of America World Headquarters. Span visible behind Telegraph Hill (far left) is the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. (photo by Sandor Balatoni courtesy of San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau)

"If you're alive," William Saroyan exulted, "you can't be bored in San Francisco."

As budding writers from small California towns, both Pulitzer Prize winners beat the keys in lighthearted penury in Baghdad-by-the-Bay.

So did I. And when I came back eight years and an odyssey later, I felt the same thrill I did as a kid at the sight of The City. From the plane it looked disconcertingly small after Tokyo and London. But San Francisco's 47 square miles are as urbane as any in the world.

It's the shape they take that's so felicitous. The City's slender pedestal is serrated by 40 hills. Their ups and downs are second nature to me now, but the views they unfold are a never-ending delight. Streets drop steeply away to blue splashes of bay. Cable cars breast panoramic peaks. Ferries, bridges, islands and headlands look back on a diaphanous skyline.

Suddenly the seawashed city vanishes, mirage-like, in a blanket of summer fog ... rematerializing moments later with tendrils of mist flying from its turrets.

The fogs that flirt with the northern California coast hid its incomparable harbor from two centuries of European seafarers. It remained for a Spanish army expedition from Mexico to discover San Francisco Bay while searching for Monterey in 1769. The first colonizing party arrived from Sonora, 1,500 miles to the south, in March of 1776. The presidio and mission they founded on the southern shore of the Golden Gate predate the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

With the discovery of gold in the nearby Sierra foothills in 1848, the sleepy settlement of Yerba Buena sprang almost overnight into a heterogenous city, never passing through the provincial town stage. In the ensuing year, 40,000 fortune-hunters poured in, peopling the port with men of all colors, customs and accents. Thus a precocious maverick was born.

San Francisco has been called many things — cocky, capricious, permissive, narcissistic — but never common-place.

The Barbary Coast's most precious legacy wasn't gold

but an ebullient liberalism. It created a climate where ethnic individuality thrives. Europeans find San Francisco curiously Continental. Asians look upon it as a home away from home. The City embraces not one but two Chinatowns, a Japanese quarter known as *Nihonmachi*, a Little Italy and a Spanish-accented Mission District. It has over 2,500 restaurants of every culinary persuasion, 37 foreign-language newspapers and a police force practiced to the point of *ennui* in staging dragon parades.

The *joie de vivre* Saroyan celebrated in 1940 in "The Time of Your Life" is as operational as ever. How, indeed, can anyone be bored in a place where string quartets share sidewalk space with flower stalls? Where you can ride a National Historic Landmark over homegrown alps to a Sicilian fishing harbor and feast on fresh Dungeness crab? Where you can walk across the Pacific (on the Golden Gate Bridge), ruminate in a redwood grove in the center of the financial district (behind the spectacular 853-foot tall Transamerica Pyramid) and island-hop on an inland sea?

Even its streets are unconventional. They slant at 31.5 degree angles, serpentine, tunnel, turn into steps, dead-end in leafy culs-de-sac and wear calligraphy signs. But don't turn in your car keys, because there are some as flat as Wichita's.

For the first-time visitor, sightseeing buses and the 49 Mile Scenic Drive provide quick familiarity courses. The latter is well marked with blue-white-and-orange seagull signs and well mapped by the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau. The route takes in Civic Center, the shopping-theater district, Chinatown, Nob Hill, North Beach, Telegraph Hill, Northern Waterfront, Marina, Palace of Fine Arts, Presidio, Sea Cliff, Palace of the Legion of Honor, Ocean Beach, Zoo, Golden Gate Park, Twin Peaks, Mission Dolores, Embarcadero and financial district, among other things.

For an overview of where you've been, pick a skyroom. San Francisco has 10 serving everything from brunch to nightcaps. They're perched at altitudes up to 779 feet above sea level atop the Bank of America headquarters building and the Holiday Inn - Union Square, Hyatt on Union Square, Hyatt Regency, Fairmont, Mark Hopkins, San Francisco Hilton, St. Francis (two) and Sir Francis Drake hotels.

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Your next best move is to put on comfortable shoes.

This is a great walking town, not only because it's so compact, but because there's a fizz in the air that acts as an energy additive.

"Square One" in San Francisco is Union Square, a formally landscaped plaza surrounded by grand hotels, smart stores and airline offices. On the square's Stockton Street side you'll discover Maiden Lane. A lurid red-light district in the long-ago, this chic, sycamore-shaded pedestrianway betrays not a hint of its bawdy past.

Turn left at Grant Avenue. You'll see a dragon-ornamented arch up ahead. This is the front door to the biggest oriental enclave outside of Asia. Chinatown covers 24 square blocks and is the ethnic capital of Americans of Chinese descent, over 100,000 of whom make their homes in San Francisco. Its hundreds of restaurants range from gourmet palaces to *deem sum* (pastry-encrusted snacks) parlors, its wares from exquisite art objects to inexpensive souvenirs. A perennial street pageant, Chinatown is in full fete during its midwinter (between mid-January and March) Chinese New Year celebration. So is the emergent Chinese quarter in the 400 to 700 blocks of Clement Street in San Francisco's Richmond District.

At the north end of Chinatown, where Grant intersects Columbus Avenue and Broadway, you come to the Italian border. A left turn on Columbus puts you into the *pasta-panettone* belt. Like most San Francisco neigh-

borhoods, this, too, is redolent with restaurants. If you're in a picnic mood, pop into a delicatessen, then take your *salami, frittata, provolone, prosciutto, mortadella, galantina*, or whatever up the street to Washington Square, the *paesani's piazza*. The lacy-spired church opposite is Saints Peter and Paul. Keep an eye out for the No. 39 "Coit" bus headed downhill on Union Street. It stops below Stockton Street and will carry you to the top of Telegraph Hill, a famous four-way observation area, for a 60¢ fare. When you've had your fill of sea and city-gazing, stroll down Telegraph Hill Drive to the first flight of steps on your left. It will lead you down past cliff dwellings, hanging gardens and a wooden "castle," Julius' restaurant, into the heart of the local Montmartre. Follow Montgomery Street right for one block, Union Street right for one block and Kearny Street left for two blocks to The Steps. At the bottom you'll find yourself alongside North Beach's most popular people-watching pew, Enrico's sidewalk cafe, in the center of the nightlife quarter. It's a short taxi or bus ride (No. 15 on Kearny or No. 30 on Stockton) back downtown.

Stationed at Union Square again with \$1 in hand, board any upbound Powell Street cable car and ask for a transfer. Get off at California Street and walk up to Mason. You're on the brow of Nob Hill, the plateau named for the 19th-century nabobs whose mansions dominated it. One such bastion, the 1886 brownstone built by silver baron James Flood at 1000 California, survives as the ultra-exclusive Pacific Union Club. The P-U's neighbors include the largest Gothic structure in the West, Grace (Episcopal) Cathedral; four eminent luxury hotels (Fairmont, Huntington, Mark Hopkins, Stanford Court), and some of The City's swankiest gourmet haunts (Alexis, Fourfou's, Le Club, L'Etoile).

If you turn right past the Fairmont's porte cochere, it's only a three-block walk down Mason to San Francisco's one-of-kind Cable Car Barn. Here you can observe the improbable machinery which keeps the motorless museum-pieces in motion. Using your transfer, catch a No. 60 cable car in front of the Car Barn and roller-coast over Russian Hill to Aquatic Park. There's enough going on along this stretch of bayfront to keep you diverted for days. Fanning out around the Victorian cable car gazebo are Ghirardelli Square, a multi-level miscellany of shops, restaurants, galleries, theaters and open air cafes ensconced in an old brick chocolate factory; the Maritime Museum, a repository of ship relics and sea lore; Hyde Street Pier with its flotilla of early California vessels; The Cannery, another recycled commercial keepsake honey-combed with eating-shopping-entertainment enticements; the Wine Museum of San Francisco; Fisherman's Wharf with its boat basin, bayview restaurants and seafood vendors, and a floating museum, the 19th-century square-rigger *Balcultha*. Boats depart from Piers 41 and 43 for Alcatraz (call 415-546-2800 for information), Angel Island, Tiburon and bay sightseeing, and helicopters take off for fly-overs of the port. Two blocks up Taylor Street, next to a diversified import emporium called Cost Plus, is the turntable for the No. 59 cable car. It will sweep you over Nob Hill to the center of The City.

As you can see, San Francisco's a cinch to explore on two feet and four bits. The Convention and Visitors

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Bureau publishes a *San Francisco Visitors Map* and a *Public Transportation to Points of Interest* flier. Write to them at P.O. Box 6977, San Francisco, California 94101 — or stop in at their Visitor Information Center adjacent to the Powell-Market cable car terminus. They also have a day-and-night phone number for events information: (415) 391-2000.

Before setting out, add these attractions to your checklist.

- Pier 39, a village-style specialty center of weathered timbers extending 1,000-feet into the bay just east of Fisherman's Wharf.

- Embarcadero Center, the new financial district focal point at the foot of Market Street.

- *Nihonmachi* with its mini-Ginza and five-acre Japan Center, Post-Buchanan Streets.

- Cow Hollow's gingerbread Victorian shopping mews, 1600-2200 Union Street.

- Golden Gate Park's Music Concourse framed by the Japanese Tea Garden, Asian Art Museum, M.H. de Young Museum and California Academy of Sciences containing Steinhart Aquarium and Morrison Planetarium.

- Two architectural dazzlers — the ultra-modern St. Mary's Cathedral (an amalgam of design by Pier Luigi Nervi, Pietro Belluschi, Richard Lippold, and others) and the Sheraton-Palace Hotel's ornately elegant Garden Court.

THERE ARE 4.8 million people in the Bay Area, 400,000 of whom commute into The City to work. On weekends San Franciscans climb into resortwear and reverse the

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San Francisco's Chinatown has a photogenic front door. The gateway to the West's biggest Chinese settlement is guarded by temple dogs and roofed with green, glazed tiles surmounted by ocher dragons. Ornamental materials for the \$75,000 structure, which frames Grant Avenue at Bush Street, were made by Taiwan artisans and presented to the city by the Republic of China. (photo by Craig Buchanan courtesy of San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau)

traffic pattern.

They look upon Marin County as the "Mediterranean" side of the bay. Sausalito, just north of the Golden Gate, is as picturesque as Portofino and as crowded on weekends. Its rustic houses cascade down steep slopes. Its shops and restaurants hug the waterfront. Its winding, wooded streets look down on a thicket of masts and a colony of houseboats. The ferry crossing from San Francisco takes 30 minutes, the drive across the Golden Gate Bridge about 20.

Muir Woods is less than 10 miles northwest of Sausalito. This shadowy redwood stand is part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area which, in conjunction with Point Reyes National Seashore, comprises a federal protectorate of 100,000 magnificent Marin coastal acres. Call the National Park Service, 556-2920, for information.

Tiburon, eight miles around Richardson Bay, is another charmer. A blend of Cape Cod and early California, the village consists of a one-block Main Street, yacht club and a cluster of open-deck restaurants. It's built around a cove sheltered by villa-studded hills. Launches link Tiburon with Angel Island, 10 minutes across Raccoon Strait, and Fisherman's Wharf, 30 minutes across the bay.

Two of the world's longest marine structures, the 8.25 mile San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge and the 3.6 mile Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) tube, connect The City with the metropolitan East Bay counties of Alameda and Contra Costa.

Jack London Square is behind the Oakland Estuary's amazing metamorphosis from mud hen to mermaid. Oakland's waterfront at the foot of Broadway has come into its own as a retail-restaurant complex. The treasure here is Heinhold's First and Last Chance Saloon. Practically everything in this historic shack of ship's timbers lists from over 100 years of roisterous conviviality. The San Francisco-born author Jack London was a regular at Heinhold's in his days as an East Bay oyster pirate. So were Robert Louis Stevenson and other writers of this period.

The Square is abutted on the south by Jack London Village. Architecturally, this maze of boutiques, bistros and boardwalks borrows from New England and Alaska's Klondike. Skiffs, ketches, tugs and cargoliners are part of the passing parade.

Six blocks east of the Square is Bret Harte Boardwalk, a Victorian row of garden shops and eating spots named for the noted Gold Rush narrator who lived nearby in the 1850's. The Boardwalk is in the 500 block of Fifth Street. The Oakland Museum, a world-acclaimed masterpiece and a handsome showcase of Californiana, is a short distance away at 1000 Oak Street.

Sleek, air-conditioned and automated BART trains will whisk you under the bay to within two blocks of the University of California at Berkeley. Though 29,000 students attend this educational Goliath, its 178-acre campus has the feeling of a small college town. Don't miss the splendid University Art Museum at 2626 Bancroft Way. A guide at the Student Union Visitor Desk, Bancroft and Telegraph Avenue, will point the way.

The Peninsula south of San Francisco — sparsely populated and beachstrewn on the ocean, heavily suburban on the bay — has blossomed into a family fun area. Its big recreational attractions are Marine World/Africa USA, a 60-acre wildlife and exhibition complex at Redwood City, and Marriott's Great America, a theme park covering 200 acres at Santa Clara. Midway between them at Palo Alto is the beautiful Stanford University campus, oak-dappled and Romanesque.

— By Marge Booker

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San Francisco for the Asking

Ask us anything about San Francisco. At the VISITOR INFORMATION CENTER our multi-lingual staff will be happy to answer and provide the information you need to enjoy The City to its fullest. Just drop by and see us on the lower level of Hallidie Plaza at Market and Powell Streets. We're easy to find. And we're there to help.

The center is open weekdays from 9 am to 5:30 pm, Sunday 10 am to 2 pm. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. ■

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