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THE NEW FILLMORE

SAN FRANCISCO ■ FEBRUARY 2009



JOE CHAMPION | FIELD/PAGAL ARCHITECTS

The library on Sacramento Street is soon to be renovated. Now there may be room to honor novelist Richard Brautigan, a one-time neighbor, who set one of his stories in the

Library of Unpublished Manuscripts

IN ITS LITERARY STAR TURN, the Presidio Branch Library, at 3150 Sacramento Street, was transformed into a fictional repository for unpublished manuscripts placed on the shelves at all hours of the day and night directly by the writers themselves.

In its more ordinary everyday life, it sits back from the street behind classical columns and arched windows, a historic Carnegie library that has been serving local readers since 1921.

And it shows. Although the library was seismically upgraded and made accessible to the disabled in the early 1990s, it otherwise remains in its original condition. There are signs everywhere

of wear and tear and maintenance that has for decades been deferred. The surrounding grounds — designed by no less than John McLaren, who also created Golden Gate Park — are more often used by dogs than by people.

And except for one easily overlooked display case near the check-out desk, there is no evidence the library was often used by noted Bay Area writer Richard Brautigan, who incorporated it into his novel, *The Abortion*, and described it in great detail as an imaginary place, with a librarian always on the premises, for writers to place their unpublished manuscripts.

Now all of that is about to change.

By RICHARD BRAUTIGAN

THIS IS A beautiful library, timed perfectly, lush and American. The hour is midnight and the library is deep and carried like a dreaming child into the darkness of these pages. Though the library is “closed” I don’t have to go home because this is my home and has been for years, and besides, I have to be here all the time. That’s part of my position.

TO PAGE 7 •

TO PAGE 6 •

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Write articles for the *New Fillmore* and the website. We're especially fond of old-fashioned journalists who write clearly and simply, but with flair.

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Newspapers are said to be an endangered species, and we know we compete not only for your time, but also with the flood of other newsprint — some wanted, much of it not — that lands on your doorstep. But we have been encouraged by how many of you read and respond to our neighborhood-specific report at the beginning of every month, and we hear again and again that there is a desire — a hunger, even — for more connection with our neighbors and our community.

Join us in the coming months as we continue to strive to create a lively and local community newspaper, while at the same time developing a neighborhood website that will have all of the advantages of the online world. Let us hear from you if you would like to be involved, or have helpful ideas.

THE NEW FILLMORE

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The neighborhood connection

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Archive of recent issues: www.NewFillmore.com
Comments and letters about neighborhood issues are welcome there, too.

JAZZ DISTRICT

Less Jazz, More Variety, Coming to Yoshi's

'We're still going to be doing jazz, but it won't be the main focus'

By ANTHONY TORRES

IT ALWAYS seemed almost too good to be true: a world-class jazz club like Yoshi's anchoring the renaissance of the Fillmore Jazz District.

Maybe it was. Word has been circulating in the early weeks of the new year that, due to the economic downturn and slow revenues, Yoshi's San Francisco has decided to break musical ranks with the jazz programming at its sister venue in Oakland. Now the Fillmore club will feature a broader mix of artists who blur and transgress musical boundaries, such as rock, soul and others.

To attract a wider audience, Yoshi's has brought in Bill Kubeczko, who previously booked acts in Minneapolis, to diversify its musical program here, rather than showcasing jazz at both clubs.

"We're still going to be doing jazz at Yoshi's San Francisco, but it won't be the main focus," Kubeczko says. He added that the Fillmore club will "respect the jazz history of Yoshi's and this neighborhood."

While local jazz fans want the club to survive, the critical issue is how respecting the Fillmore's jazz history will translate into what Yoshi's starts to do — and to what extent the club will be transformed into a site musically closer to the Fillmore Auditorium, just up the street, and the other venues in the city.

Yoshi's was never exclusively a jazz club. In the year it has been operating here, Yoshi's has brought in a wide variety of acts: the heavily African-based Hugh Masekela and Orchestra Baobab, a range of Latin based groups such as Eddie Palmieri's La Perfecta and the Puerto Rican Jazz All Stars, straight-up soul and blues players and several groups and musicians steeped in Brazilian traditions.

This month, for example, from February 6 to 8, Yoshi's will present acts as varied as guitarist AL DI MEOLA, whose work with Chick Corea's Return to Forever and guitarists like John McLaughlin and Paco de Lucia is legendary. He is most noted for his Latin-influenced jazz fusion works, which are rooted in his explorations of Mediterranean cultures and acoustic genres like flamenco, all of



Since it opened in the Fillmore Jazz District a year ago, Yoshi's has never been exclusively a jazz club. Now there will be even broader mix of music.

which accounts for di Meola's technical wizardry, his extremely fast, fluid, complex compositions and guitar solos.

Then, on February 11 and 12, Yoshi's will feature the MASTER MUSICIANS OF JOUJOUKA, whose music adheres to the tradition of their patron saint and has been passed down for 1,200 years. These musicians gained notoriety through their

association with the Beat generation's William Burroughs, Timothy Leary, Rolling Stones founder Brian Jones and Ornette Coleman. It was Burroughs who, after visiting their village, referred to them as a "4,000-year-old rock and roll band." Their music is part of the Sufi tradition, and they are said to be descendants of the royal musicians of the sultans. In past

centuries their ancestors, master musicians of the Joujouka village, were traditionally exiled by the country's rulers from manual labor to concentrate on their music. Its trance-inducing rhythms and woodwinds are considered to have the power to heal the sick.

Also appearing this month, on February 14 and 15, is IRMA THOMAS, a contemporary of Aretha Franklin and Etta James, even though she has never gained their notoriety or commercial success. Nevertheless, she won a Grammy in 2007 for the Best Contemporary Blues Album and has long been considered the "Soul Queen of New Orleans." She is a singer who has paid her dues and continues to make great music despite being completely under-recognized. She is a real-deal soul singer in the best R&B tradition and she is certain to savor the place on Valentine's Day. This will be a rare chance to see one of the best of the best soul singers around.

Then, on February 25 and 26, there is NATON BEAT, a group that operates at the intersection of infectious Brazilian maracatu drumming, New Orleans second line rhythms, Appalachian-inspired bluegrass music, rock and country-blues. Their brand of music is striking in that it combines seemingly incongruent musical forms — bluegrass and Brazilian country music — by American and Brazilian musicians, and finds common ground by fusing music from the southern United States and northeast Brazil. The result is festive party music that rocks.

The central issue regarding the changing musical formats at Yoshi's may be this: This thing called jazz is a hybrid of ever moving and changing musical blends that from its conception has connected a range of diverse musical practices. It is an open area of musical inquiry that is in a constant process of translation and negotiation. Jazz should be viewed less as an established field than as one that opens up musical issues, poses questions and interrogates the terms of artistic communication and intercultural dialogue as a means of informing a range of musical practices. In this broader sense, jazz will live on at Yoshi's.

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CRIME WATCH

Auto Theft Baker and California Streets December 12, 5:19 p.m.

While on patrol, officers observed a silver Rolls Royce. Earlier in the day, they had received a report that a car meeting that description had been stolen. A computer check of the license plate of the vehicle before them indicated it had indeed been stolen. The officers conducted a traffic stop and detained the driver. The driver stated that he thought the vehicle might have been stolen, but insisted that the alleged owner had given him the key. The officers were unable to contact the vehicle's owner. The suspect, who had no driver's license and several outstanding warrants, was arrested for auto theft.

Aggravated Assault and Battery Sutter and Fillmore Streets December 15, 3:30 p.m.

A witness to a battery called police and told them he was following the suspect. The witness told the officers he saw the suspect push one person, then punch a woman in the face, causing her to fall to the ground. Officers placed the suspect under arrest. The woman who had been struck was treated at the hospital for a cut to her head.

Burglary Gough and Bush Streets December 24, 12:15 a.m.

Officers on patrol observed a man on the street who had an outstanding parole warrant for his arrest. The man matched the description officers had been given of a suspect in several car break-ins in the area. The officers detained the man. After a search and an investigation, they booked the suspect on burglary charges and for violating parole.

Warrant Arrest Lafayette Park January 11, 10:30 a.m.

An officer arrived at Lafayette Park after receiving a report of a noise disturbance. He met with a witness, who told the officer that people in the neighborhood were complaining about a man in the park who was drinking alcohol and playing a drum loudly. The officer met with the drummer, who proved to be deaf. The officer got a notepad and managed to have a written communication with him. A computer

check revealed several outstanding warrants for the suspect's arrest. He was then placed under arrest and booked.

Hot Prowl Franklin and California Streets January 13, 5:45 p.m.

Officers received a report that someone was attempting to break into a house. The officers arrived and detained a man who was leaving the property. The officers searched the house and located another man inside. The owner of the house told the officers he had heard loud noises coming from the garage area. He then heard someone on the stairs, followed by banging sounds coming from the back door. He called 911. Officers investigating the property found a damaged safe and signs of forced entry in the garage. The second suspect was holding the hinges to the safe when he was detained. Both suspects were placed under arrest and booked.

Robbery With Force Franklin and Pine Streets January 15, 4:30 p.m.

Officers received a call about a robbery. The woman who had been robbed told the officers that the suspect had grabbed her from behind and punched her. The suspect then tried to take her purse, but the woman managed to keep her grip on it. During the struggle, she lost her cell phone. She told police that her assailant then got into a vehicle with two other occupants. The officers searched the area and located the suspects and the vehicle. The woman who had been attacked identified the man who stole her property and he was placed under arrest. The officers searched the immediate area and found the missing phone in a garbage can. The two occupants of the car were identified and released. The suspect was booked at Northern Station.

Community meeting
The monthly meeting to discuss questions and concerns about public safety in the neighborhood will be held Tuesday, February 10, at 6 p.m. at Northern Station, located at 1125 Fillmore Street.

Police contact numbers
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■ EXCERPT

► FROM PAGE ONE

I don't want to sound like a petty official, but I am afraid to think what would happen if somebody came and I wasn't here.

I have been sitting at this desk for hours, staring into the darkened shelves of books. I love their presence, the way they honor the wood they rest upon.

I know it's going to rain. Clouds have been playing with the blue style of the sky all day long, moving their heavy black wardrobes in, but so far nothing rain has happened.

I "closed" the library at nine, but if somebody has a book to bring in, there is a bell they can ring by the door that calls me from whatever I am doing in this place: sleeping, cooking, eating or making love to Vida who will be here shortly.

She gets off work at 11:30. The bell comes from Fort Worth, Texas. The man who brought us the bell is dead now and no one learned his name. He brought the bell in and put it down on a table. He seemed embarrassed and left, a stranger, many years ago. It is not a large bell, but it travels intimately along a small silver path that knows the map to our hearing.

Often books are brought in during the late evening and the early morning hours. I have to be here to receive them. That's my job.

I "open" the library at nine o'clock in the morning and "close" the library at nine in the evening, but I am here twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week to receive the books.

An old woman brought in a book a couple of days ago at three o'clock in the morning. I heard the bell ringing inside my sleep like a small highway being poured from a great distance into my ear.

It woke up Vida, too. "What is it?" she said.

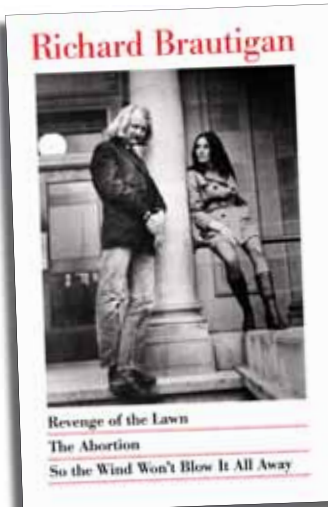
"It's the bell," I said.

"No, it's a book," she said.

I told her to stay there in bed, to go back to sleep, that I would take care of it. I got up and dressed myself in the proper attitude for welcoming a new book into the library.

My clothes are not expensive but they are friendly and neat and my human presence is welcoming. People feel better when they look at me.

Vida had gone back to sleep. She looked nice with her long black hair spread out like a fan of dark lakes upon the pillow. I could not resist lifting up the covers to stare at her long sleeping form.



The cover of Richard Brautigan's novel *The Abortion* — now republished along with two other stories he wrote — includes a photograph of the author taken on the steps of the Presidio Branch Library on Sacramento Street.

A fragrant odor rose like a garden in the air above the incredibly strange thing that was her body, motionless and dramatic lying there.

I went out and turned on the lights in the library. It looked quite cheerful, even though it was three o'clock in the morning.

The old woman waited behind the heavy glass of the front door. Because the library is very old-fashioned, the door has a religious affection to it. The woman had a look of great excitement. She was very old, eighty I'd say, and wore the type of clothing that associates itself with the poor.

But no matter... rich or poor... the service is the same and could never be any different.

"I just finished it," she said through the heavy glass before I could open the door. Her voice, though slowed down a great deal by the glass, was bursting with joy, imagination and almost a kind of youth.

"I'm glad," I said back through the door. I hadn't quite gotten it open yet. We were sharing the same excitement through the glass.

"It's done!" she said, coming into the library,

accompanied by an eighty-year-old lady.

"Congratulations," I said. "It's so wonderful to write a book."

"I walked all the way here," she said. "I started at midnight. I would have gotten here sooner if I weren't so old."

"Where do you live?" I said.

"The Kit Carson Hotel," she said. "And I've written a book." Then she handed it proudly to me as if it were the most precious thing in the world. And it was.

It was a loose-leaf notebook of the type that you find everywhere in America. There is no place that does not have them.

There was a heavy label pasted on the cover and written in broad green crayon across the label was the title:

GROWING FLOWERS BY CANDLELIGHT IN HOTEL ROOMS

BY MRS. CHARLES FINE ADAMS

"What a wonderful title," I said. "I don't think we have a book like this in the entire library. This is a first."

The library came into being because of an overwhelming need and desire for such a place. There just simply had to be a library like this. That desire brought into existence this library building which isn't very large and its permanent staffing which happens to be myself at the present time.

The library is old in the San Francisco post-earthquake yellow-brick style and is located at 3150 Sacramento Street, San Francisco, California 94115, though no books are ever accepted by mail. They must be brought in person. That is one of the foundations of this library.

This library rests upon a sloping lot that runs all the way through the block down from Clay to Sacramento Street. We use just a small portion of the lot and the rest of it is overgrown with tall grass and bushes and flowers and wine bottles and lovers' trysts.

There are some old cement stairs that pour through the green and busy establishments down from the Clay Street side and there are ancient electric lamps, friends of Thomas Edison, mounted on tall metal asparagus stalks.

They are on what was once the second landing of the stairs. The lights don't work any more and everything is so overgrown that it's hard to tell why anything ever existed in the first place.

The back of the library lies almost disappearing in green at the bottom of the stairs.

The front lawn is neat, though. We don't want this place to look totally like a jungle. It might frighten people away.

Excerpted from *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966* © 1970 by Richard Brautigan

Local Library Next in Line for Renovation

► FROM PAGE ONE

Planning is in the final stages for a \$2.4 million renovation of the library, which will close this summer for a makeover as part of the city's ongoing plan to upgrade its branch libraries. It is expected to reopen in 2010.

"The bones are fantastic," says architect Mark Schatz, of Field Paoli, the architectural firm masterminding the renovation in partnership with Joseph Chow & Associates. Schatz and his colleagues have already planned the renovation of other branch libraries, and at the Presidio Branch, he is enthusiastic about what he calls "the jewel that it was and can be again."

The renovation means more computers, an improved children's room, a designated teen area and a redesigned community room downstairs, along with entirely new fixtures, finishes and furnishings. "It is primarily an interior renovation," says city librarian Luis Herrera, and one that he promises will "keep the historic integrity of the architecture."

Funding has now been found for some exterior renovations, which must be in ac-



The Presidio Branch Library was designed in the Italian Renaissance style by architect G. Albert Landsburgh, who also designed the Warfield and Golden Gate Theaters and the interior of the Opera House.

In the years since Brautigan's novel was published in 1970, there has been a regular stream of letters from readers of *The Abortion* asking if there really is a library at 3150 Sacramento Street and if it really does accept unpublished manuscripts. Some even send a manuscript, although the novel makes it clear the manuscripts must be brought in person by the author.

Now the queries come mostly by email, including one in 2007 from a Brautigan reader in the Czech Republic. "I turn on you with a polite request. This time I have been reading a novel about the romantic possibilities of a public library in California," wrote Miroslav Goidic. "I would like to ask you if your library is open 24 hours too and if your library is depository for unpublished manuscripts too."

Brean answers the inquiries, as did her predecessors. Hers may not be the fictional library Brautigan described — and she does go home at night — but she says the renovated library will commemorate Brautigan's creation.

"I am totally committed," she says. "We'll find a way to do it."

cord with the strict standards set for landmark buildings. In addition, the main stairs will be rebuilt.

A survey of library patrons — nearly three-quarters of whom live within a mile of the library — found considerable sentiment for attention to the scrappy landscaping of the library grounds, which are often peppered with dog droppings. Although no funds are available for landscaping, a groundswell of neighborhood concern now makes it likely there will be improvements.

Judith Taylor, a library user who lives nearby and is a director of the San Francisco Garden Club, has persuaded the garden

club to adopt the library grounds. Another neighbor, a student of landscape design at the University of California at Berkeley, has developed preliminary plans for a new look. They hope to involve other neighbors in raising funds to improve the grounds and perhaps create separate spaces for dogs and for children.

And branch librarian Marjorie Brean is determined that former neighbor Richard Brautigan, who made the library the setting for his novel, will be appropriately honored in the renovated library.

"It's very special," she says. "We can't let that just evaporate into history."

There May Yet Be a Home for Those Unpublished Manuscripts

BY MARCIA POPPER

ON THE main floor of the Presidio Branch Library, there is a display case devoted to the Beat writer Richard Brautigan. It contains examples of several of his books and some of the many letters and manuscripts the library has received through the years from readers of his novel, *The Abortion*, which takes place at the library, even giving the actual address.

For some years a volunteer group of Brautigan aficionados in Burlington, Vermont, ran, on a very part time basis, a "library" that solicited and accepted only unpublished manuscripts and used mayonnaise jars for bookends, as in *The Abortion*.

Eventually that library closed and the public library in Burlington displayed the collection of manuscripts — about 300 — and a few Brautigan artifacts lent by his daughter, Ianthe Brautigan.

When the Burlington Public Library determined it could no longer devote space for the collection, I and some others — including Marjorie Brean, Presidio branch librarian — tried for several years to persuade the San Francisco Public Library to accept the collection for display at the Presidio branch. But library officials decided it was not an appropriate collection to hold here.



The special collections division at the Main Library does have the originals of the few unsolicited manuscripts that were sent to the Presidio branch over the years and many letters asking if the writer could

send a manuscript. For practical reasons, the answer was always no. During the years the Burlington library functioned and accepted manuscripts, the writer was referred there.

Although our efforts to bring the collection to San Francisco were not successful, Washington State University indicated an interest in taking the Burlington collection, eventually planning to put it online and make it available for research. It does appear Washington State would be able to make the collection available to a much wider public than the San Francisco Public Library could. Brautigan's daughter and the originator of the Burlington volunteer library are in the process of arranging the final details of the transfer.

It is my hope that once Washington State has the materials — and after the Presidio branch is renovated — we can jointly plan periodic events at the library, making use of the materials and expertise at both institutions. I hope there will be a well-designed display area, and even the possibility of borrowing occasionally from Washington State.

Neighborhood resident Marcia Popper is one of two representatives of the Presidio Branch Library to the Council of Neighborhood Libraries.

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Condos / Co-ops / TICs / Lofts	BR	BA	PK	Sq ft	Date	Asking \$	Sale \$
8 Cottage Row	2	1	0	700	19-Dec	575,000	575,000
2200 Pacific Ave #4B	1	1.5	1	1172	15-Jan	638,000	580,000
2473 Sutter St	2	1	1		23-Dec	679,000	630,000
1880 Steiner St #403	2	2.5	1	1569	17-Dec	899,000	820,000
2731 California St	3	2	1		31-Dec	1,399,000	1,310,000
1929 Jackson St	3	3	2	1863	24-Dec	1,498,000	1,470,000
2701 Broderick St	2	3.5	1		14-Jan	2,495,000	2,400,000



From mid-December through mid-January, only one single family home — at 2686 Green Street — sold in the neighborhood.

It's the economy, not the calendar

I can already hear you asking, "What gives? Only eight sales in the past 30 days?" It's true — and it's highly unusual. Even though the end of one year and the beginning of another is traditionally the slowest time for sales, compare these eight closings to 23 sales during the same period last year. So the real story is not the calendar, but the economy.


Many people are asking about the local market. "Have we hit bottom yet?" No one knows, and there is a wide diversity of opinion about what the future portends. To give one example, I recently attended an event with keynote speaker Ken Rosen, an economist, real estate expert and professor at the University of California at Berkeley. His opinion was that we are currently in a deep recession and there is a 70 percent probability the country will remain in deep recession through 2009. But he pointed out that the nation is not feeling its effects equally; California is faring better than much of the nation, and San Francisco is doing better than most of California. So the chances of only a moderate recession are greater here, and it is less likely real estate in our neighborhood will be as severely affected as in other areas of the country.

THE ONE SALE. The sale of 2686 Green is a good example of how properties are selling in the current market. The 4-bedroom, 2.5-bath home has approximately 3,000 square feet, much of it in very good original condition. The home first came on the market at the end of September priced just shy of \$3.5 million — and just as the stock market underwent some of its largest one-day losses. After several weeks without activity, there were two price reductions, ending at \$2.95 million in mid-November. Three weeks later it went into contract, then three weeks after that closed at \$2.775 million — more than three months after it was listed and 20 percent below its original listing price.

Buyers are feeling no urgency in this market, so price reductions are more common and homes are taking longer to sell.

— 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 345-3834.

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Evening Prayer 5:00 pm

Reconciliation Sat 5:00 pm,
Sun 7:00, 9:00 & 11:00 am, 5:00 pm

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LOCALS

CLEAN & GREEN

■ Since 1969, the Huie family has been caring for the neighborhood. Now a new generation is charting a more environmentally sensitive course.



Brothers Karl and Will Huie with family matriarch Kam Huie.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KRISTEN STEHLE

By ANNE PAFROCKI

of eco-friendly dry cleaners in the Bay Area, leading the way with what owner Karl Huie believes to be dry cleaning's cleaner, safer future.

Located at 2437 Fillmore Street, near Jackson, Pacific Heights Cleaners is still owned and operated by the same family that first opened the doors in 1969. Matriarch Kam Huie, now in her late 70s, still warmly greets customers as they come in to pick up their clothes.

While an eco-friendly, water-based method of cleaning is both more expensive and more difficult to master than traditional, solvent-based dry cleaning, that didn't stop owners and brothers Karl and Will Huie from making the switch. Inspired by a dry cleaning convention they attended in the summer of 2007, they got rid of the solvents and switched to the wet-clean system both on Fillmore and at Sunshine Cleaners in Sausalito, which they opened in 1999.

Karl Huie insists that going green was an easy decision and something that he had to do for his customers and employees. "We did it for health: the health of our customers, the health of our staff and the health of our planet," he says.

Traditional dry cleaning uses a solvent

TO PAGE 10

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Dry Cleaning Has Become Wet Cleaning

FROM PAGE 9

called perc, for perchloroethylene, a carcinogen the state of California has begun to phase out and will ban completely by 2023.

Many dry cleaners are starting to make inroads toward greener systems because of the crackdown, but Huie says most are simply switching to another solvent.

"Unfortunately, the new solvent of choice that they claim is organic is hydrocarbon, which is a petroleum product," he says. "The other common solvent being used is called Green Earth, which is a silicon-based solvent."

Huie says the wet cleaning method used at Pacific Heights Cleaners does not generate hazardous waste or produce air pollution. In fact, the products used are gentle enough to be disposed of down the drain, he says, and are "easily handled by the local water treatment plants."

Customers have been happy with the change. Huie says he has seen a significant increase in business, which helps recoup the additional costs of the wet-cleaning system.

"The clothes are much cleaner with this system, the colors are brighter, the wools and cashmeres are much softer and there is no chemical smell — only a fresh, clean citrus scent," he says.



Kam Huie has been keeping neighborhood clothes cleaned and mended since she and her husband opened Pacific Heights Cleaners in 1969.

Pacific Heights Cleaners takes its green business philosophy a step further than the solvent-free system. It also uses hangers made of recycled materials, offers reusable garment bags and has changed its laundry service to use only natural soy and plant-based soap.

Huie says his desire to change the business and inspire the industry is part of his personality. When his parents Kam and Philip Huie began to contemplate retirement, they asked all of their children

if they wanted to purchase the business. Only Karl was interested.

"The entrepreneur gene is in my blood," he says. "I wanted to continue and take the business to the next level."

He's so committed to his new approach that he invites owners of other dry cleaners to visit and get a feel for the new system, hoping he can help make the entire industry greener.

Despite its modern outlook, Pacific

Heights Cleaners still has a personal, family feel that comes from having owners who grew up working on Fillmore Street in the business. While other eco-friendly dry cleaners will surely be popping up as the per ban goes into effect and consumers begin looking for alternatives, only at Pacific Heights Cleaners can you share a smile with Kam Huie and learn a little neighborhood history while getting that stain out of your favorite shirt.

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FIRST PERSON

B.C. — Before Coffee on Every Corner

It's hard to imagine Fillmore without its many coffee shops, but it wasn't that long ago

BY BARBARA WYETH

ONCE WAS A TIME, and not so long ago, when San Franciscans who wanted a good cup of coffee had to go to North Beach. Then most coffee could be best described as a watery brown liquid that gave you the jitters but at least got you going in the morning. Espresso was almost unknown west of Columbus Avenue.

Locals coming back from North Beach — or from Paris and Rome, where the air is rich with the smell of strong coffee — wondered why we couldn't have good brew in our neighborhood. So things began to change.

First came the specialty roasters, mostly small companies that began to pop up in the neighborhoods. For a time the Fillmore had J. B. Louks on California Street, located where the pet boutique George stands today, where you could buy beans whole or ground. Good coffee was something you made at home in a French press or a Melitta pot.

Then cafes began opening in the neighborhood. In the beginning there were some one-of-a-kind spots, including the Trio Cafe, which introduced me to those wonderful big bowls of cafe au lait. There were a number of small chains, including Martha and Brothers, Royal Ground and Spinelli's. Some are still with us, some are long gone, some have changed hands.

NOW IT'S HARD to imagine a time without a double decaf, non-fat, dry cappuccino and before the neighborhood was filled with coffee shops. In addition to the three Starbucks along our stretch of Fillmore, there's also Peet's, the Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, Bittersweet, the Grove, as well as the boulangerie and the patisserie — and my morning favorite, Tully's, up at the top of the street.

I usually arrive about 7:30 every morning. The staff has been there for a while and they're on. During the school year, especially, it's a busy time, and there are often 10 or 12 people waiting in line. There's a veterinarian in scrubs from Pets Unlimited, teachers from Hamlin or one of the other schools in the neighborhood. The girls from the Convent Schools are ordering double mochas or chai-lattes, their skirts so much shorter than anything I could get away with when I was in high school.



Cheshire Cheese, located where Noah's Bagels now operates, was among the first shops to offer specialty coffee drinks on Fillmore Street.

What about all the waste they create?

When Vanick Der Bedrossian returned from Ghana, where he studied cultural anthropology, to his family's Fillmore Street restaurant, La Mediterannee, he was astonished by the waste generated by the three nearby coffee shops. So he decided to do something about it.

He has created Common Cause Coffee, a group formed to persuade coffee shops here and across the country to reduce waste from disposable products. The group will hold its first meeting this month at — where else? — a coffee shop. Peet's, at Fillmore and Sacramento, on February 11 at 6 p.m. "This is the seed," he says. "It might grow into something." Contact Der Bedrossian at commoncausecoffee@gmail.com.

There are customers I know from the flower shop where I work who ask me what's in season. Sometimes I'll get an order for a later pick-up. Young moms leash the family dog outside and come in with their strollers. Then there are the

joggers, fresh from their workout and ready for a warm reward.

The Mexican carpenters chat and drink brewed coffee. The Latina nannies and housekeepers tease them, then giggle and joke among themselves. A construction

worker who often rides the same bus I take always orders a double espresso, as I do. Once I had forgotten my wallet, and he stepped in and paid for me. I was able to return the favor a few days later.

The baristas know my order and have it ready by the time I reach the counter. They are my morning angels. My grogginess dissipates. I feel ready to seize the day — or at least get to work on time.

MORE THAN the brew itself, the rise of the local coffee shop as a neighborhood hangout is a real phenomenon. In the old days, did we all fix coffee at home in the morning? How did we function without cafes? Where did we meet friends before the movie, or go to talk about it afterwards? Where did the book group go to linger and talk about the latest novel, and maybe get a pastry or a little bite to eat? Where did we stop after a long day at work just to sit, relax and finally get a look at the day's paper?

On a sunny, warm day, what better place to watch the world go by than at a table in front of your favorite latte joint? For those brave enough to try online dating, the cafe is a perfect and safe place to meet. Job interviews seem less stressful and not so intimidating in the fragrant cozy atmosphere of the coffee shop.

Although plenty of people do it, I have a hard time understanding the concept of plugging into the Internet at a coffee shop. Perhaps it's because coffee makes me even more chatty than usual. But if you've got work to do and the four walls at home get too confining, many people are finding coffee shops a good place to work. If not actually mingling with like-minded souls, you're at least in their company.

Loyalty to a coffee shop has a great deal to do with the baristas. Maybe it's all that caffeine, but they're usually a friendly, quirky crew, mostly young, it seems, but not always. The interaction between the coffee makers and the coffee drinkers is a nice exchange. It's the kind of relationship that binds us to our neighborhood — our village, as it were — and makes us feel at home. The neighborhood pub may serve much the same purpose, but the cafe seems a lot healthier, and not nearly so noisy and rowdy.

We all have our favorite restaurants, but few of us are there every day. For a great many of us, though, every day starts at the coffee shop.

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