

# COASTAL LIFE

CLOSE TO HOME

Books, gardening, hiking, hobbies,  
recreation, personalities, travel & more

## NORTH TO WILLAPA BAY, SOUTH TO SAN FRANCISCO

By DAVID CAMPICHE

In the 1850s, fleets of sailing ships departed San Francisco under fair winds and pushed north. Their destination was Willapa Bay, home of the sweet and salty bivalve. Each oyster sold for a gold piece in the cafes and better restaurants of the booming metropolis. With about 600 miles or 10 days aboard the wooden sloops, travel could turn treacherous.

Assisted by the strong backs of Native Americans, James Gilchrist Swan and early pioneers aided in the gathering and delivery of these oysters. The industry was a bonanza. The relationship between tiny outpost and the burgeoning city bonds us, fair citizens, as distant partners in the love-hate relationship with the oyster.

Step forward 160 years. Oysterville, the tiny Washington frontier town founded by I.A. Clark and R.H. Espy, has actually shrunk. Four streets with taverns, hotel and churches have washed away. Tide and winter storms took them, street by street. San Francisco has blossomed the other way. Now a city of over a million, she attracts, through her golden gate, people from all over the world.

It attracted my wife and me recently, on a four-day hiatus. Rather than arriving aboard a three-masted schooner, we flew. A shuttle into town didn't break the bank, but this ride was the last of the hot deals. The city is expensive, as are hotel rooms and dining out. Uber is a must, unless you're silly enough to drive your own rig. The streets are taxing, to say the least. Be that as it may, the city is charming, and the diversity of people a rich cornucopia of humanity.

We ate Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, Italian, French, Northwest and/or combinations of all the above. Dim sum tickled our palates. Fine Chinese preserved the pocketbook and diverted all but basic table talk. I gobbled down everything in front of me, hardly breathing in between. North Beach is famous for Café Trieste, City Lights Bookstore and striptease. We didn't

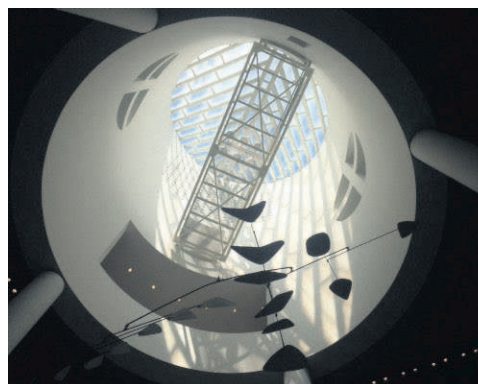
see Gary Snyder, William Burroughs or Jack Kerouac, but, on the streets, there was plenty of skin, and all of the tattoos and costumes of a counter culture. You don't have to pay for entertainment; it's in view for free. So are the homeless, and in great numbers. I felt blessed to be there and compassionate for the less favored. Rents are intolerable, but the same story is being told in Portland and Seattle. Drugs and mental illness are crippling our neighborhoods, big or small.

Museums cost \$20 to \$30. I preferred paying this to the price of a double martini. The Asian Art Museum was my favorite, but I have a prejudice: I'm a potter, and the best of stone and clay antiquities decorated the halls and showrooms of this spectacular museum. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art raised my blood pressure considerably. What a wonderful treasure trove, beginning with Post Impressionism and galloping into today.

After pastries at the famous Tartine Bakery, the De Young Museum never pleased me more. What a collection, or, a series of collections. The museum features American art from the 17th century through the 21st, international contemporary art, textiles, and art from the Americas, the Pacific, and a show-stopping collection of African art. Across town, the Legion of Honor showcases a fine collection of European art. Both are a must.

I confess. I love cities with fine art. San Francisco has its fair share. It also has a view. Let me ask you, is that view any more special than our own Willapa Bay, say from a kayak on Lewis Slough at dawn or sunset? Say, walking through a 5,000-year old cedar grove when sunlight slashes like golden blades, and all the world feels green and rich and opulent? Those giants speak to me in a way no skyscraper can.

What is interesting here, at least to my brand of thinking, is how we are attracted to both rural and urban landscapes. How each has its appeal. San Francisco is a stunning city of disparate and



PHOTOS BY DAVID CAMPICHE

An interior shot of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

priceless views, and a 180-degree turn from the pristine environs of our Columbia-Pacific home. Judge not, I say. Each waits with separate gifts. Who could argue?

Back home the tide has turned. It's flooding over the oyster beds off Agate Beach. The water is rising and warm. Slip down to your skivvies and take a plunge. Can't do that off of Fisherman's Wharf. But you can't get Vietnamese fusion on Long Island either. That is, unless you concoct your own and carry it across the salt water in a picnic basket. On the other hand, you can gather up a few littleneck clams or shuck a fair Willapa oyster. Don't be greedy.

Speaking of Vietnamese fusion, the Slanted Door was fine and so were the cocktails, both making the vista of the Golden Gate Bridge even more spectacular. Another favorite is the Fog City Grill. What salads!

But what about those oysters. Here, in this lovely urban Mecca, genuine Willapa Bay bivalves still find their way into the gullets of tourists and locals alike. Here, on the streets of this enchanting city. Here, where one night we saw "Carminé" at the opera, a modern version that unfortunately lacked strong voice; a debtor's opinion. We ate late dinner at 11 o'clock on Bush Street at a hip restaurant called Bouche. Eating late can be fun in a city that never quite sleeps. It can be invigorating because it is a change of pace. Eating at 11 o'clock can be difficult in Astoria, the river city, though a fine repast is available at Albatross, or at master cocktail magician Rich Ewing's Inferno Lounge.

Back in Oysterville the ghost of Willard



An ancient Jomon vase from the Neolithic period at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco.



A Buddha stone face at the Asian Art Museum.

Espy haunts the sweet simple street that tiptoes past the antique church and pioneer school house, and calls out creative juices for a good number of artisans, including the well versed writer Sydney Stevens, niece of the indomitable Willard Espy, and a chip off the old block.

What might Sydney be doing on such a fair summer day? Perhaps she is sitting on her back porch with a glass of white wine in her hand. Sitting, drinking and appreciating one of the finest landscapes in the western United States. Perhaps she is shaping a missive, or simply remembering her charming uncle who lived in New York City but left his heart in Oysterville.

**WE ARE ATTRACTED  
TO BOTH RURAL AND  
URBAN LANDSCAPES.  
SAN FRANCISCO IS  
A STUNNING CITY  
OF DISPARATE AND  
PRICELESS VIEWS,  
AND A 180-DEGREE  
TURN FROM THE  
PRISTINE ENVIRONS  
OF OUR COLUMBIA-  
PACIFIC HOME.  
JUDGE NOT, I SAY.  
EACH WAITS WITH  
SEPARATE GIFTS.**