



SAN FRANCISCO

It's Queerdom's Golden Gateway! Perhaps there's nowhere else in the world that gay people so freely call home.

Matt Mathrani

If you trace the history of this foggy, windy peninsula you'll realize it was invaded by gold miners, peopled by soldiers returning from wars, and then descended upon by Haight-Ashbury flower children propounding free love. Today, this legacy translates into an accepting populace proud of the past and embracing its present diversity.

The city has been ladled over some 49 hills, offering great views from many a crest; you'll either have enviable quadriceps or asthma before your sojourn is through. Parking will inevitably land you a ticket, but public transportation on the MUNI (via subway, rail, bus, or cable car) and BART make life easy.

Going out

It's reckoned that half of the city's denizens are decidedly queer. Add those who haven't made up their mind, and you can see why local establishments do a *volte face* for the pink dollar.

San Francisco vaunts three distinct

pockets with an even higher fairy density: the famous Castro, Polk Street, and the SOMA (South of Market Area), especially around Folsom and Harrison between 6th and 12th Streets.

Twin Peaks (401 Castro Street), a landmark of a pub, has been around forever. And aptly enough, it favors an older clientele.

Harvey's (500 Castro, at 18th Street) is the "Hard Rock Cafe of Queerdom." Be it two-dollar beer or the snootiest bourbon around, you'll find it at this gay-and-lesbian hangout, which serves meals all through the day as well.

At **Jet** (2348 Market Street) gentlemen's club, the decor is chic and there's a \$3 cover on weekends. And if the tinkling of other men next to you is your thing, the urinal here is heaven.

Across the street, perched on the second floor, **The Cafe** (2367 Market Street) is a well-trod nightspot with both women and men. There's no cover, and the dance floor swells on weekends. The Cafe does not permit shirtless dancing for men out of deference to the many lesbians who throng here.

Perched right above a restaurant

called Squat and Gobble, **The Lookout** (3600 16th Street, at Noe) is where Metro used to be. Under new management, The Lookout is starting to unfold with a personality of its own, and boasts spectacular views of the Castro.

Metro City Bar (2124 Market Street, at Church) relocated to this new location not too long ago. The bar opens at 6 a.m. for those early risers. There are pool tables, video machines, and a bonhomie that owners Richard and Mario seem to bring no matter where they go. Super Sundays at the Metro translate into football, hot dogs, and beer specials.

Located on the world's gayest street, **Midnight Sun** (4067 18th Street, at Castro) is a stand-and-model video bar. Half a block away, **Moby Dick** (4049 18th Street) is a neighborhood bar that draws guys of all genres. With a tagline that reads "Drink, play pool and pinball, stare at fish!" this place rocks, and not just for the happy hour (Monday through Friday from 4 to 8 p.m.). A huge saltwater fish tank perched right above the bar is, of course, their trademark. A beer blast every Sunday keeps the place well-trammeled.

Kyle, Kevin, Mike, & Jake at Metro



At The Watergarden, San Jose

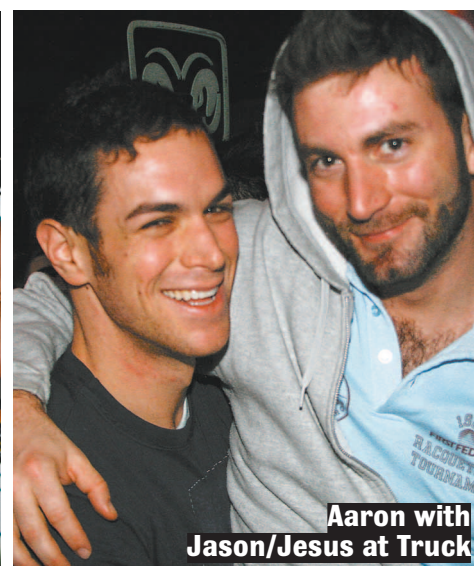


Bartenders Wayne and Javier at Cinch

At The Watergarden, San Jose



Bare Chest contestant L. Ron with MC Scott at Powerhouse



Aaron with Jason/Jesus at Truck

Nearby, **The Mix** (4086 18th Street), drawing mid-aged friends-of-Dorothy, is a mostly local-neighborhood bar. An outdoor patio here adds an al fresco feel, and some cigarette smokers.

440 Castro (440 Castro Street), in the sacred heart of the Castro, used to be Daddies, but in its current incarnation, folks of all assortments make this their stop. And the underwear party every Monday night is so chocker, there's not much underwear left on Castro Street.

While **Badlands** (4121 18th Street) continues to cash in on Mariah Carey's crooning from-the-crotch-up seven days a week, **The Bar on Castro** (456 Castro), a lounge bar in the very thick of it, has a regular DJ who capitalizes on the dance floor license.

The Mint (1942 Market Street) is the city's karaoke heaven, with an outdoor patio, good for those who smoke.

Still funky and friendly after 30 years, **The Cinch** (1723 Polk Street) offers something for everyone. Besides the rockin' cocktails, there's the smok-

ing patio, pool tables, games and HDTVs for sports and "Runway / Top Model" viewing. For live entertainment there's Anna Conda's infamous Charlie Horse Friday nights. Joystick is the gay "gaymers" night-out every first and third Saturday night. On most holidays, Lucy Borden creates and hosts an outrageous show.

NTouch (1548 Polk Street) is the premier Asian gay club in town. High-energy dancing is on the roster on weekends, with specials posted on their up-to-date website. A daily happy hour kicks in at 3 p.m., running through 8:30 p.m.

Marlena's (488 Hayes Street) is a neighborhood bar drawing many "theatrical" actor types.


The Castro meets the Haight at **Trax** (1437 Haight Street, between Ashbury and Masonic Avenue). At this friendly neighborhood bar expect free popcorn, generous cocktails, and personable bartenders.

At **Esta Noche** (3079 16th Street) the daily revues are rather feminine, though none of the performers actu-

ally boasts a quim. They're located smack in the Mission, but you're transported very south of the border. It's a good place to cruise, with a motley mix of hot boys, daddies, some white guys, as well as trannies. There's no pretense, and the atmosphere is low-key and friendly. Moreover, there's a cozy dance area to swing it. The weekend *tardeadas* (happy hours) tout good drink specials and free sopes, taquitos, and such.

Head to SOMA for **The Stud** (399 9th Street, at Harrison) a bar *cum* nightclub that draws gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and hip straight folk since 1966. Their intimate dance floor, drink specials, and an indescribable "something" makes it a prime spot. Whether it's Tranny Shack Tuesday or Sugar Saturdays, The Stud is a well-loved gay institution packed with zaniness.

Eagle Tavern (398 12th Street, at Harrison) is the largest leather hangout, and comes complete with a leather store on-premises. Sunday afternoons are busy for the beer specials in the enclosed outdoor space.



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Lone Star Saloon (1354 Harrison Street) draws bears, cubs, and their aficionados. The outdoors patio is a plus, especially for smokers. Local artists often display their stuff here.

Powerhouse (1347 Folsom Street) is replete with nooks 'n' crannies, and boasts groovy DJs. Home of the bare-chest calendar contest (currently every first, third, and fourth Thursday of the month), this is a temperature-raising leather bar. There's a separate open-air area for those into lighting it up. Lots of touchy-feely is one reason for their popularity.

Hole in the Wall Saloon (289 8th Street) is a wacky, fun watering hole that feels like a time warp with its blinking lights and strange smells. It's been called the epitome of a dive and it is proud to be so hailed. Scandalous antics in corners and cheap drinks are the hallmark of this leather-ish bar. Don't bring your straight friends here, unless they're on something.

Truck (1900 Folsom, at 15th; TruckSF.com) is the newest gay bar

driving onto the San Francisco scene. Truck has made a name for itself as the Castro alternative. Drawing a 20s to mid-30s crowd, Truck offers a bit of everything. From drag shows on Sunday to Speakeasy on Tuesdays, Truck always offers something to keep them boys entertained.

Just barely after we roll of the press, **Chaps II** (1225 Folsom, between 8th and 9th) will have opened its doors. This new fetish/leather bar takes over a space occupied by a bar named My Place.

SOMA or South of Market is another hotbed of activity. There are a number of prominent venues, such as **The Stud** (399 9th Street), as aforementioned. **The Endup** (401 6th Street) is literally the place where people end up after a night about town, especially as of 6 a.m. on Sundays.

Get the 411 on Gus Bean's famous parties (think Adonis, Frathouse, Boy Bar, The Crib) usually hosted on special weekends by visiting **Guspresents.com**.

Those seeking a whiff of the alter-

native, might want to visit **Underground SF** (424 Haight Street) in the lower Haight-Ashbury area. They offer a well-blended gay and straight crowd at their nightly shindigs, which include hip hop and reggae. Their predominantly gay night is called Drunk & Horny, hosted every Saturday. Their sweaty dance floor attests to a good night out.

Getting physical

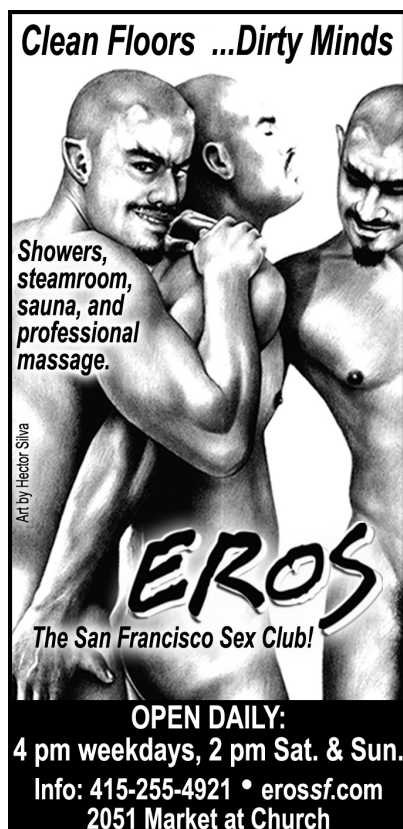
Gold's Gym (2301 Market Street), with windows overlooking Market Street, is more than just a strut palace. This is a full-fledged co-ed muscle factory, with free weights, machines, and a cozy, cruisy locker-room area.

The Gym SF (2275 Market Street) is a men-only gym, quite reasonably priced.

Locals and tourists alike continue to hook up at the busy **Blow Buddies** (933 Harrison, near 5th), a private safer-sex club with over 180,000 members throughout the world. The club is always open Thursday through

Continued on page 55

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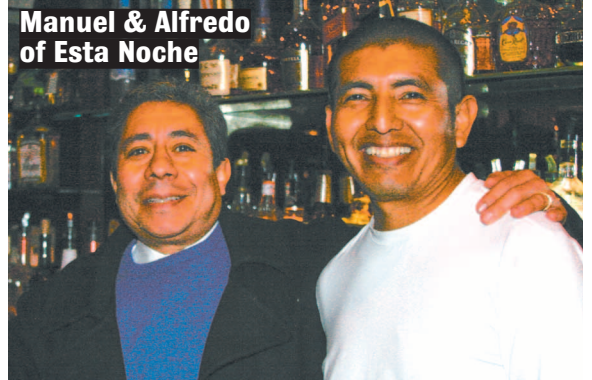
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**Randy, Jose, Rick,
& Lou of Eros**



**Manuel & Alfredo
of Esta Noche**



**Powerhouse staff: Jose, Paul, Scott,
& Carlton (in the rear)**



**James, owner Tony, & manager Tom
at Leather Masters, San Jose**



**Doorman Rick with barback
Benjamin at 440**

**DJ Charles
of Powerhouse**



Edgar, Tim, & Shane of All American Boy

SAN FRANCISCO

CLUBS

/RESTAURANTS

- 22) 440 Castro**
(415) 621-8732
440 Castro St
- 1) Cinch**
(415) 776-4162
1725 Polk St
- 9) The Eagle Tavern**
(415) 626-0880
398 12th St
- 14) Esta Noche**
(415) 861-5757
3079 16th St
- 24) Harvey's**
(415) 431-HARV
500 Castro St
- 19) 1507 Polk St**
(415) 922-6467
- 27) Loading Dock**
(415) 864-1525
1525 Mission St
- 16) Lone Star Saloon**
(415) 863-9999
1354 Harrison St
- 6) Metro City Bar**
(415) 703-9750
2124 Market St
- 2) Moby Dick**
www.Mobydicksf.com
4049 18th St
- 18) Powerhouse**
(415) 552-8689
1347 Folsom St
- 21) The Stud**
(415) 863-6623, 399 9th St
- 14) Trax**
(415) 864-4213
1437 Haight St

- 23) Truck**
(415) 252-0306
1900 Folsom St

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- 25) All American Boy**
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463 Castro St
- 17) Auto Erotica**
(415) 861-5787, 4077 18th St
- 11) Blow Buddies**
(415) 777-HEAD
933 Harrison St
- 3) Chaps**
(415) 863-1699
4057 18th St
- 5) A Different Light**
(415) 451-0891
489 Castro St
- 26) Eros**
(415) 864-3767
2051 Market Street
- 10) Mack Folsom Prison**
(415) 252-1221
1285 Folsom St
- 4) Mercury Mail Order**
(415) 621-1188
4084 18th St
- 13) Nob Hill Cinema**
(415) 781-9468
729 Bush St
- 12) Phantom**
(415) 864-7529
516 Castro St
- 10) Taste of Leather**
(415) 252-9166
1285 Folsom St

- 20) Taste of Leather**
(415) 373-6008
2380 Market St

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- 7) Chateau Tivoli**
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- 28) Parker Guest House**
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drawing
(c) Ira Smith

At A Taste of Leather (Castro store)

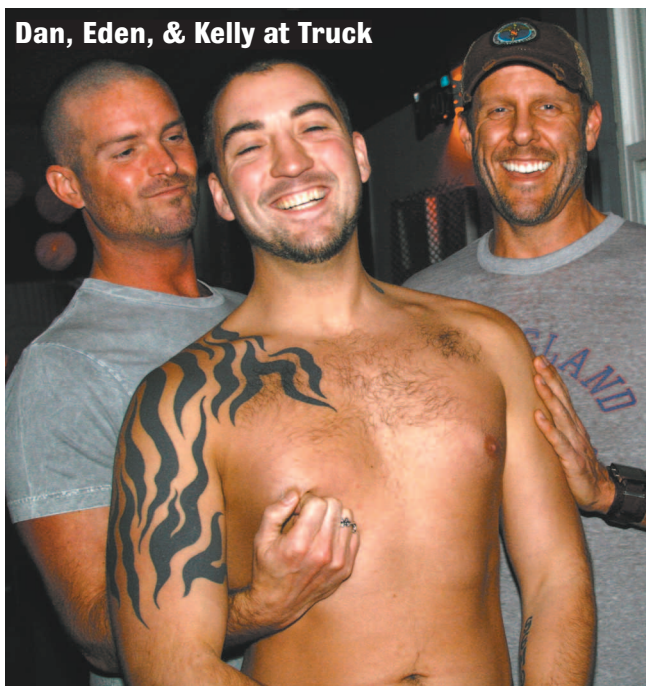


Bartender Brian
of the backbar at 440

Portland
partygoers
at Metro



Dan, Eden, & Kelly at Truck



Owner Paul with Lucas at Truck

Continued from page 50

Sunday. On Wednesdays there are popular theme events, such as Underwear Buddies, Bear Buddies, Golden Shower Buddies, Naked Buddies, and Leather Buddies. A posse of friendly members and staff contained in the clean 6000-square-foot facility attracts hundreds of guys each night they're open. There's even a backyard patio area for a quick smoke or some discreet play. Free HIV and STD testing and education/counseling is offered on-site. Call their phone-line at 415-777-HEAD or visit Blowbuddies.com for specifics on dress code, directions, and special events.

Succumb to the ways of the flesh at **Mack Folsom Prison** (1285 Folsom Street, at 9th Street), the sex club located right by **A Taste of Leather** (see more under "shopping"). The crowd is generally of the leather type, but many a twink gets his ticket punched here. The membership-only club has five prison-lofts tucked inside, as well as a "gas chamber" (appropriately set aside

for those who smoke cigarettes!). A "sweatbox" on premises with infra-red heating is unique to Mack Folsom Prison. Moreover, a free internet lounge and lots of high-definition porn on plasma make for much randiness.

They must know what they're doing at **Eros** (2051 Market Street), an acclaimed safe sex club for over 16 years and the only such spot in the Castro. An ever-changing uncensored erotic art gallery, two video pits, bunk beds, certified massage therapists, sensual spa area (comprising showers, sauna, and steamroom) ensure you'll be rather happy here. Every Tuesday and Thursday, find comfort at their Indulge Day Spa as of 11 a.m. (the club otherwise opens at 4 p.m.).

SF Citadel (1277 Mission Street), a leather space / community center / educational center, hosts sex parties on weekends, quite worthy of a visit.

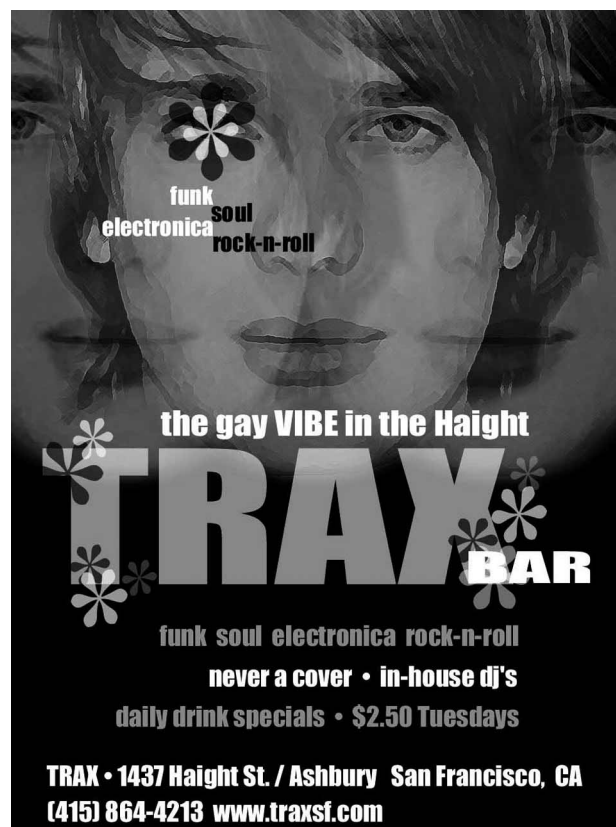
Nob Hill Theater (729 Bush, at Powell), "famous from the day they opened," is now celebrating its 40th anniversary. At this longest-running

gay adult theater in North America, the upstairs area features live shows while downstairs there's a 75 channel arcade. With a retail store featuring DVDs, lubes, and toys, they have something for everyone.

Steamworks (2107 4th Street, Berkeley; Steamworksonline.com) has been the Bay Area's favorite men's bath-house for over 30 years. It's pretty close to San Francisco, right off I-80 in Berkeley. A full gym, eucalyptus steam room, whirlpool, lockers and a variety of private room-options (including fetish and sling rooms) are in store. There's a 16-channel DVD video system with fleshy treats, public play-spaces with hexagon booths, maze, snacks, live DJs, free wi-fi, and lots of hotties. On-site STD and rapid HIV-testing is at hand.

Cafes & such

A visit to San Francisco is not complete without a stopover at the shrine of cruise: **Cafe Flore** (2298 Market Street) – a.k.a. "Cafe Hairdo" – is a glass menagerie where many a Regina holds



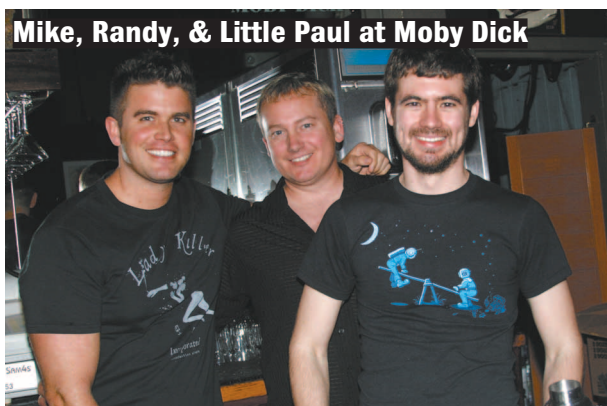
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electonica
soul
rock-n-roll

the gay VIBE in the Haight

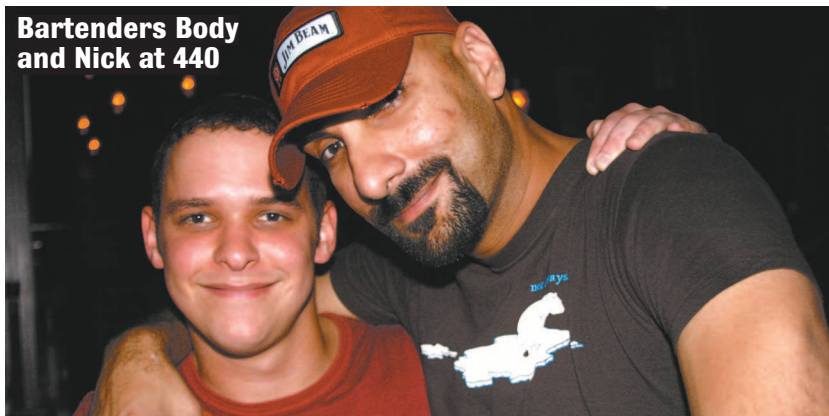
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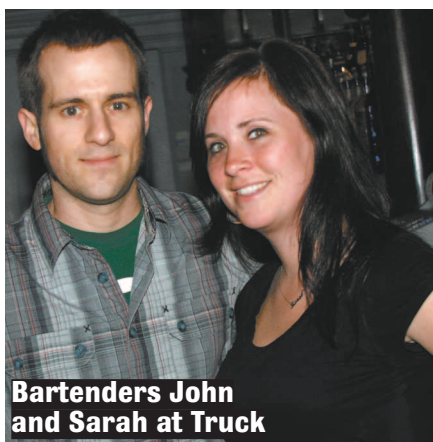
Bartenders Body and Nick at 440



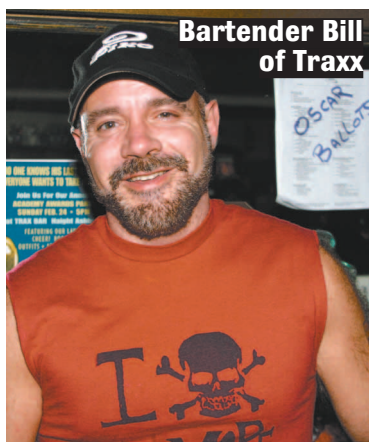
Gender-bender Veronica and Michael at Cinch



Bartenders John and Sarah at Truck



Bartender Bill of Traxx



Staff at Hotel Renoir



court. The Californian fare is toothsome, and there's outdoor-seating, too, though the indoor perches are more coveted.

Bagdad Cafe (2295 Market Street), a prime 24-hour diner in the Castro area, vaunts food that is inexpensive, palatable, and runs the gamut from tofu burgers to meaty treats.

The vinyl booths and jukebox at **Orphan Andy's** (3991A 17th Street, at Castro) are full-on 24 hours a day. People come for standard American diner fare as well as traipse in for early morning coffee.

The ambiance at **2223** (2223 Market Street) is romance-inducing. This severely gay-frequented restaurant offers tablecloth dining and food that is "eclectic California."

Luna (558 Castro Street) is a French/Italian-inspired restaurant with a covered and heated patio.

Blue (2337 Market Street) is famed for dishing out glorified diner-style brunch, lunch, and dinner.

Barracuda (2251 Market Street) is a sushi bar *cum* restaurant serving superb fare in a modern, stylish setting. An almost edible staff makes for a compelling visit.

Thai Corner (2200 Market Street) has all the staples you'd expect. But there's not a single item on the menu that isn't exactly delicious. You'd leave here saying "Thai me up again!"

For vegan gourmet international cuisine, chow down at **Millennium** (580 Geary Street), a "celebration of healthy eating that will leave your taste buds singing."

Lodgings

Parker Guest House (520 Church Street; 888-520-7275) is a renovated mini-mansion in the Castro with rooms that boast private baths, cable, modem, and voicemail. Computer users will appreciate the complimentary DSL connections and other business-friendly amenities. A large breakfast room, formal dining room, library, sunning deck, and expansive gardens make for a delightful stay. There's even a cozy steamroom tucked downstairs open to



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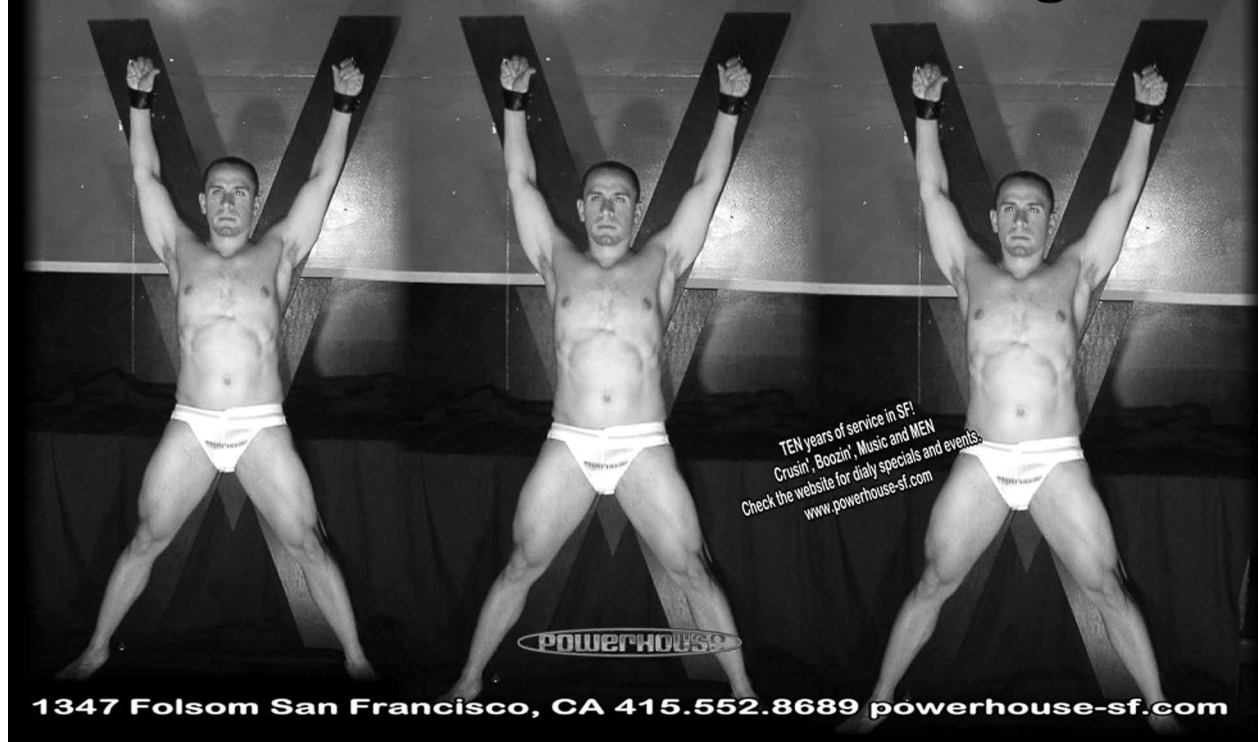
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Travelodge (1707 Market Street; 888-515-6375), located by the action, is a good budget choice. Rooms with a wrap-around balcony make for a cruisy stay.

Renoir Hotel (45 McAllister Street; 415-626-5200) is a historic boutique hotel with 133 guest rooms including two suites. There's cable TV, in-room safe, high-speed wi-fi internet. Their special rooms with "views" are a treat, especially around gay pride in late June (the parade goes right by the hotel!) and during the Folsom Street Fair. Their new trendy on-premises bar/lounge, called "Etiquette," is open five days a week (and open as a night club on weekends). A new restaurant is to open this spring.

The magnificence of gay-friendly **Chateau Tivoli** (1057 Steiner; 800-228-1647) has to be seen to be believed. It has been called "the best Victorian in San Francisco and the greatest painted lady in the world." This B&B is a sybaritic treat.

Another gay-oriented lodging is **Inn On Castro** (32 Castro Street; 415-861-0321).

Shopping and more

Phantom (516 Castro Street) offers an extensive selection of DVDs that incite prurience, a giant selection of sex toys, and prides itself on the best prices in the Castro. A neon sign in their window reads "Lube 4 Less," reaffirming their commitment to offering goods at affordable prices.

Chaps (4057 18th Street) used be Jaguar Bookstore in a not-so-recent past. Now it's "the place for jock- and sport-inspired gear for men." You'll find retail novelties, leatherwear, military/uniform wear, flight jackets, and more at affordable prices.

Established in 1976, **All American Boy** (463 Castro Street) serves the Castro's wardrobe needs. Items range from clubwear, dress-up, beach-and-gym wear, plus oodles of accessories. At All American Boy, they seek "a

chance to show you some of their unique items."

Mercury Mail Order (4084 18th Street) offers sex gizmos suited to all kinks. They ship all over the U.S. at prices truly competitive. Their larger sister store, **Auto Erotica** (4077A 18th Street), carries a huge selection of dildos, gay vintage posters, back issues of magazines, and videos.

A Taste of Leather (1285 Folsom Street and 2380 Market Street) has returned to San Francisco's Castro District. Established in 1967, ATOL has provided the leather community with the finest handcrafted leather apparel and goods, as well as the hottest erotica, for 41 years! Augmenting their flagship store on Folsom Street in the heart of South of Market district, their spacious new store on Market Street at Castro proffers leather pants, chaps, vests, shirts, shorts, belts, harnesses, hoods and other fetish wear, not to mention toys, lubricants, aromas, and DVDs. Their excellent leather craftsmen also specialize in custom-made apparel and expert repair work.

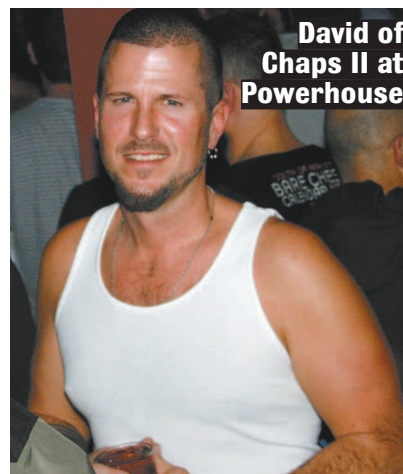
Mr. S Leather & Fetish (310 7th Street) is huge! Spread out over four stories, this 15,000-square-foot leather/latex/bondage heaven is very quality-oriented.

Beach Blanket Babylon – the outrageous, wacky stage parody featuring the biggest hats ever – is a recommended San Francisco experience. Call 415-421-4222 for showtime and ticket information.

Harvey Milk Institute (584B Castro Street, suite 451; 415-552-7200) offers educational opportunities to students in the queer communities. Be it transformational meditation or mastering the rituals of erotic self-loving, the courses are designed purely for the joy of learning.

Walking tours of the Castro by **Foot! Comedy Walking Tours** (Foottours.com; 415-793-5378) and **Cruisin' the Castro** (415-255-1821; Webcastro.com/castro-tour) come recommended.

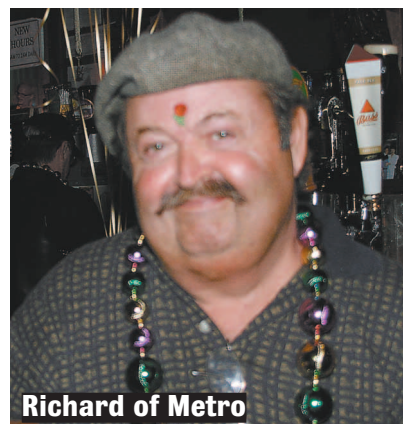
There's a large, chic **SF Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Community Center** (1800 Market Street, at Octavia).



David of
Chaps II at
Powerhouse



Tim, with Montreal
friend at Truck



Richard of Metro



At A Taste
of Leather
(Folsom
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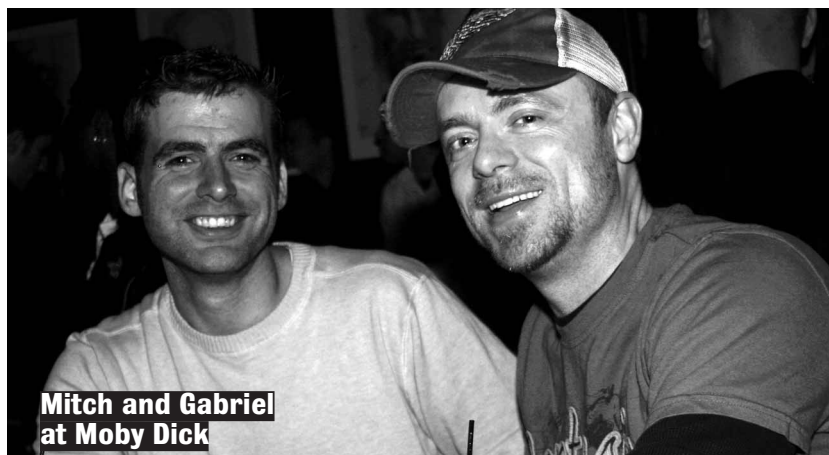


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Among the 142 GLBT community centers nationwide, San Francisco is the first built from the ground up. The 40,000-square-foot state-of-the-art structure is among the largest in the country.

A bit about San Jose

Located in Silicon Valley, about an hour south of San Francisco, San Jose is more than just a world center for the software industry. Gay attractions here include **The Watergarden** (1010 The Alameda), a spotless bathhouse that's more like a resort, and is celebrating 31 years. From the sun-filled garden patio to immaculate private rooms, The Watergarden takes pride in every detail. Their community lounge features free billiards and spacious reading areas. Get wrapped up in the 61-inch TV in the adult-movie room. The air-conditioned facility features an outdoor pool and spa, a sunning patio, a steamroom, gym, private rooms, two shower rooms, and more. It's a "proactive," "not-shame-based" pleasure palace with sex educators on premises! Thursday nights are Latino Night here with a beat that's grooved by DJ Kuervo.

Leather Masters (969 Park Avenue; 408-293-7660) is for leather apparel and SM goodies, ranging from nipple toys to slings. Accessories of every kind are on display. Shop on-line or call for their extensive catalog. A huge store in Dallas (3000 Main Street) is their Texas outpost.

Hunters (349 South First Street) is a franchise of a bar with sister establishments in Palm Springs and Chicago. Take It Off Tuesdays, Whip it Out Wednesdays, and Sinful Saturdays are some of their weekly highlights.

Billy DeFrank Lesbian and Gay Community Center (938 The Alameda; Defrank.org) is San Jose's community space, recently expanded and renovated.

Outnow magazine (Outnow-mag.com) is a good resource for the Peninsula and Silicon Valley. ▼