

# Portola

## A congenial mix of working-class families

BY CAROLINE GRANNAN

**A**sk even native San Franciscans about the Portola District and they'll probably think you're talking about West Portal — especially if you've pronounced the name the way many locals do: PORTola, not PortOLA.

You explain patiently that the neighborhood is connected neither to West Portal nor to Portola Drive. It's west of the Bayshore Freeway, just south of where Highway 280 branches off to Daly City. This may elicit some recognition, since most people have passed it dozens of times on their way to the airport or the Peninsula.

The Portola is bounded by the Bayshore on the east, 280 on the north, McLaren Park and Mansell Avenue to the south and Madison Street at the top of McLaren Ridge to the west.

The Portola doesn't get much publicity. The last newsworthy thing it did may have been to help elect former San Francisco Supervisor Dan White, assassin of Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk. White grew up in the area and represented it under the district election system.

Its major landmark, McLaren Park, sometimes makes the news, often in connection with some unpleasant event. Woodrow Wilson High School, which has a reputation for occasional gang violence, is also in the neighborhood.

The neighborhood is actually a quiet, stable area of neat, unpretentious single-family homes. Its rundown but lively shopping district, San Bruno Avenue, reflects the area's Italian-Maltese background and its current amiably eclectic ethnic makeup.

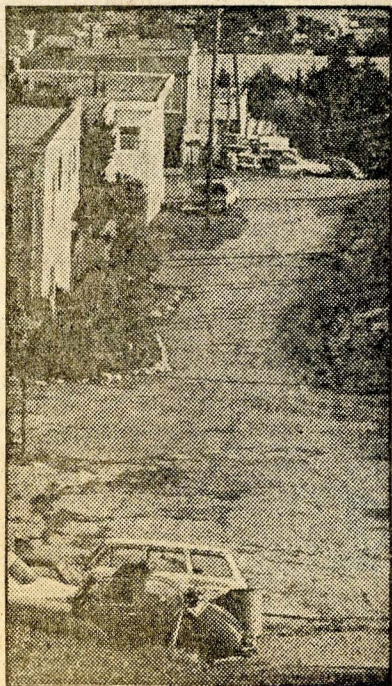
Some typical San Francisco features exist in the district: hills, sweeping views and pastel-painted houses. What you won't find are croissant bakeries, singles bars, gentrification, highrises, parking problems or, usually, fog.

Home prices are far lower than in other parts of the city; it's still possible to find a decent single-family house for under \$100,000.

"The average home in the Portola District is in real good shape — I'd say 95 percent of them are," says realtor Robert J. Grassilli. "They're pretty well-built homes."

Franco Mancini, 39, who has lived in the Portola all his life, remembers his neighbors raising cattle, goats, geese and chickens. "I remember as a newspaper boy being chased by the geese all the time," he says. "It was all very, very rural — the streets weren't paved. We used to go riding at the horse stables in McLaren Park."

"There were windmills every where. In the old days the whole



neighborhood used underground springs with windmills to pump the water up. It's such a windy neighborhood it was perfect."

To add to the rural feeling, Mancini recalls, "there used to be old feuding families — it was like living in the Ozarks."

Until the tract houses started going up after WWII, commercial horticulture was a major activity in the Portola. Greenhouses lush with red, pink and white carnations and roses still occupy a few acres at Wayland and Cambridge streets and farther east at Woolsey and Bowdoin.

Near the top of McLaren Ridge at the western side of the district, Burrows and Mansfield streets are still unpaved and rural-looking for a couple of blocks along the edge of McLaren Park. Dilapidated houses with rusting pickup trucks parked in front retain an Ozarks atmosphere; on warm Sundays the smell of barbecue wafts from the yards and dogs wander in and out of open front doors.

Decades ago there were plans to locate San Francisco City College in the neighborhood; anticipation ran so high that streets in the district were named after prestigious international universities: Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge, Yale, Dartmouth, Goettingen.

But City College ended up a



few hills away, in the Ingleside District, and the only institution of higher learning in the Portola these days is the Christian and Missionary Alliance's Simpson Bible College, an impressive building on Silver Avenue.

The Portola's shopping district, San Bruno Avenue, runs along the west side of the Bayshore Freeway. "The Road" is not terribly urbane, but it has the basics — drugstores, small markets, coffee shops and neighborhood bars. Old men speaking Italian and teenagers of various ethnic groups cluster along the avenue.

Armanino's delicatessen is the place to buy Italian foodstuffs: imported pastas, meats, panettone, wines. Directly across the street is Vic & Betty's Soul Bar-B-Q, one of the best barbecue joints in the city. Fresh Poultry, Fish and Shellfish, near Silver Avenue, specializes in gumbo ingredients and Southern-style varieties of fish.

Cairo's Cafe, probably San Francisco's least chic espresso house, is a hangout for district merchants. The marquee outside Antonelli's bar often announces a neighborhood couple's anniversary or carries a political message (a

while bad Proposition

The A street spe foreign la Arabic or obscure music betv

**S**an im up is, Rasmussen Catholic aren't fan

Demo differs son rest of th family dis San Fran mussen. " movement

Many Hunters J who move their jobs predomin retired po St. Elizab

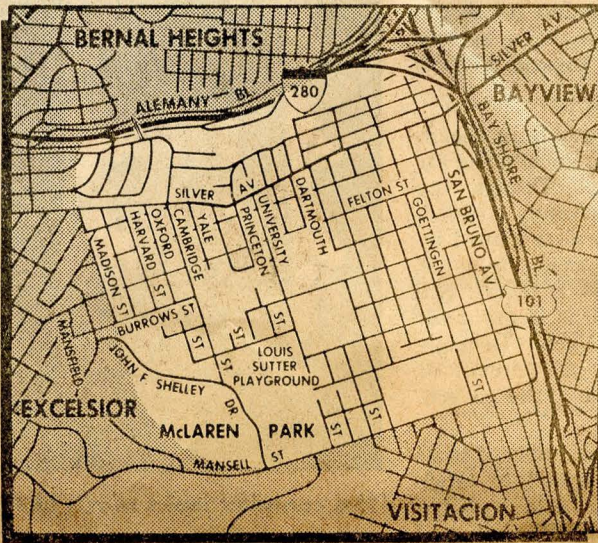
Se



# RHOODS



Photos by Steve Ringman



Clockwise from top: row houses line Portola District residential streets; map of the district; view of San Bruno Avenue, the neighborhood's shopping area; rural-looking street bordering McLaren Park

few hills away, in the Ingleside District, and the only institution of higher learning in the Portola these days is the Christian and Missionary Alliance's Simpson Bible College, an impressive building on Silver Avenue.

The Portola's shopping district, San Bruno Avenue, runs along the west side of the Bayshore Freeway. "The Road" is not terribly urbane, but it has the basics — drugstores, small markets, coffee shops and neighborhood bars. Old men speaking Italian and teenagers of various ethnic groups cluster along the avenue.

Armanino's delicatessen is the place to buy Italian foodstuffs: imported pastas, meats, panettone, wines. Directly across the street is Vic & Betty's Soul Bar-B-Q, one of the best barbecue joints in the city. Fresh Poultry, Fish and Shellfish, near Silver Avenue, specializes in gumbo ingredients and Southern-style varieties of fish.

Cairo's Cafe, probably San Francisco's least chic espresso house, is a hangout for district merchants. The marquee outside Antonelli's bar often announces a neighborhood couple's anniversary or carries a political message (a

while back it was "Vote No on Proposition N").

The Avenue Theatre down the street specializes in silent movies, foreign language films (sometimes Arabic or Greek), 3-D movies and obscure oldies, with live organ music between shows.

**S**an Bruno Avenue "could be improved, could be dolled up the way Union Street is," says the Rev. Howard Rasmussen, pastor of St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church. "The businesses aren't fancy, but they do the job."

Demographically, the Portola differs somewhat from most of the rest of the city. "It's very much a family district, surprisingly so for San Francisco," says Father Rasmussen. "There's no sign of the gay movement in here at all."

Many residents are former Hunters Point shipyard workers who moved there to be close to their jobs, and the district is still predominantly working class. The retired population is so large that St. Elizabeth's had to create a



# Portola

## The city's hidden neighborhood

From Page 29

second seniors group to catch the overflow from the first.

"I always call it the international settlement of San Francisco," says Mancini. "They have every nationality type imaginable. Originally it was all Italian and French; right now it's still Italian, a lot of blacks, a lot of Orientals. There's a large Maltese community."

Away from Woodrow Wilson High, there is little racial strife. Twenty-year resident Christine Ortiz says she can't say the neighborhood is exactly integrated but notes that "different groups are plunked down together so you have a nice chance to get together if it works out that way."

Longtime Portola resident Mary Brook, editor of the Portola District News, calls St. Elizabeth's the "real center of the community" and says its Tuesday night bingo games are "the neighborhood's main social outlet." With the area's Italian population and the more recent influx of Filipinos and Hispanics, the church plays an influential role.

The Portola is "pretty safe" with few crime problems, according to Patrolman Jay Parashis, who walks the San Bruno Avenue beat. Burglaries are "sporadic" and purse snatchings "on the decrease," he says.

The most frequently mentioned problem is lack of attention from City Hall. Former Supervisor Don Horanzy, a Visitation Valley resident who represented the Portola under the district election system, claims the area's one drawback is the lack of "basic city services — police and recreation seem to be in short supply compared to other areas, and the Muni service is poor."

One transit writer has called the 30-Freeway Express, which is the only direct line from San Bruno Avenue to downtown, "the worst commute run in the Bay Area." Two crosstown bus lines, both unreliable, run between San Bruno Avenue and Mission Street and connect with BART stations.

The other obvious area of



View across the Portola District to the East Bay hills from a McLaren Park hillside

neglect is McLaren Park. "The south side of the city is usually considered lower class" and is treated as such politically, believes Mancini, who says the only bad thing about living in the area is "watching it go to pot because the city doesn't provide any services."

The Portola branch of the public library was one of four branches recently downgraded to a "reading center," which means it's staffed by a "technician" rather than a librarian, and its hours have been reduced to noon to 5, Monday through Thursday.

There are two elementary schools in the neighborhood, Hillcrest and E.R. Taylor, but junior high schoolers attend Pelton in the Bayview or Luther Burbank in the Excelsior since Portola Junior High closed several years ago.

While the area may not have much clout with politicians, it can get pretty noisy about occasional issues.

One prolonged controversy involved the San Francisco Youth

Campus, a home for emotionally disturbed adolescents, at the Convent of the Good Shepherd on Cambridge Street. A non-profit group of mental health professionals overcame three years of strident neighborhood opposition to open the facility in 1980.

Former Supervisor Dan White first came to prominence as leader of the opposition to the Youth Campus, claiming that 95 percent of nearby residents were against a home for the "chronically disruptive" in their area.

The issue, says Christine Ortiz, whose husband, Oscar, is chairperson of the Youth Campus Advisory Committee, "bitterly divided the neighborhood. The general populace, I think, has a rather small understanding of mental illness. The picture was presented to them by Dan White," among others, "that some very terrible things could happen."

Since the home opened, she says, neighbors have found that "it's doing good things, that it's not

the threat to their security it was once perceived."

Many longtime Portola residents, Ortiz says, "are very concerned that their home turf could change. There's a certain complacency about the area and people want it to stay the way it is."

Some of the newcomers are even changing the pronunciation of the district's name to PortOLA, the way most people say it up on Portola Drive and down south in Portola Valley.

Actually, neither pronunciation is correct. Spanish explorer Don Gaspar de Portola, after whom the area is named, had an accent on the final syllable: PortoLA.

Whatever their pronunciation, most residents are pleased with the neighborhood. "I love it," says Mancini. "I can't think of any bad things about it."

Horanzy agrees: "I don't think there's anything that blocks that area from being one of the most attractive" in San Francisco.

A three-hour Valentine's cruise, including refreshments and dancing, will leave at 4 p.m. Sunday from Pier 39. The Blue and Gold Fleet cruise will benefit the American Heart Association.

### PROGRAMS

Holidays of Japan will be discussed at 1 p.m. next Friday at the Ikebana International meeting in the Hall of Flowers at Golden Gate Park.

American holiday table settings, calligraphy and dolls will also be on display.

### GREENGROCER

JOE CARCIONE

There has been a lot of concern on the part of consumers about the fumigating of out-of-state fruit coming into California. As we have mentioned, the amount of fumigant used is minuscule and is allowed under California law.

What we have neglected to say is that it is used on whole carloads of fruit and touches only the outside of it, never the fruit under the skin.

The people who should be most concerned about it are the handlers at the wholesale market who must uncrate the fruit, not the consumer. As soon as the crates are opened, the fumigant is soon dissipated. There is little chance any more than a trace could remain on the skins of the fruits.

Many markets are starting to cut pineapples in half and that's good for people who don't need a whole one. Until lately, markets only cut them when part of the fruit was

### UPCOMING EVENTS

These upcoming activities around the Bay Area are open to the public:

#### FASHION

Sewing and dressmaking classes will be given from 9 a.m. to noon beginning next Friday at the Stonestown YMCA, 333 Eucalyptus Drive.

A fashion show and luncheon, presented by Soroptimist International of Oakland, will begin at 11:30 a.m. Saturday, February 20, at Goodmans Hall, 10 Jack London Square.

#### HEALTH

A nine-week stop-smoking class

will begin at 6 p.m. Tuesday at District V Health Center, 1351 24th Avenue. The class, a San Francisco city and county program, will use behavior modification techniques.

Preventing and relieving low back pain will be the topic of a program beginning at 6 p.m. Thursday at St. Francis Memorial Hospital, 900 Hyde Street.

#### RECREATION

A 20th birthday party and skate-a-thon, benefitting St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, will begin at 11 a.m. Sunday at the Ice Capades Chalet at the San Mateo Fashion Island, whose merchants are sponsoring the event.

## A Rejected Gift-Giving

BY BETTY CUNIBERTI

Washington

A love-struck man holed up in a \$200-a-day Washington hotel has spent, at latest estimate, close to \$20,000 demonstrating to his beloved that he won't take "No" for an answer to his marriage proposal.

On bended knee Christmas Day, Keith Ruff, 35, once a stock broker in Beverly Hills, proposed marriage to Karine Bolstein, 20, a cocktail waitress at a Washington restaurant whom he met in a shoe store last summer.

She looked down and said, "No."

Since then, Ruff has remained in Washington, demonstrating his wish that she reconsider by sending her everything but a partridge in a pear tree.

That may be next.

The tokens of his affection include:

- A Learjet, placed on standby at the airport, "in case she wanted to ride around."
- Between 3000 and 5000 flowers.
- A limousine equipped with a bar and television.
- A gold ring.
- Catered lobster dinners.
- Musicians to serenade her.
- A man dressed as Prince Charming, bearing a glass slipper.

### THE BRIDGE COLUMN

CHARLES H. GOREN AND OMAR SHARIF

East-West vulnerable. East deals.

♦ Void  
♦ K J 10 7 2  
♦ K J 4  
♦ K Q 10 8 6  
♦ Q J 5 2  
♦ Q 5 3  
♦ A 5 3 2  
♦ 7 5  
N  
W  
E  
S  
♦ 10 8 7 6  
♦ 8  
♦ Q 10 9 8 6  
♦ J 3 2  
♦ A K 9 4 3  
♦ A 9 6 4  
♦ 7  
♦ A 9 4

The bidding:  
East South West North  
Pass 1 ♦ Pass 2 ♦  
Pass 2 ♥ Pass 4 ♥  
Pass 6 ♥ Pass Pass  
Pass  
Opening lead: Seven of ♠.

Since West was looking at a possible trump trick, we can make a good case for an opening lead of the ace of diamonds. But West feared that might tip declarer off to his trump holding, so he settled for a club lead — and lived to regret it.

l m a g

REMODELING YOUR HOME?  
...our kitchen experts can help!