

September 2005

San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf

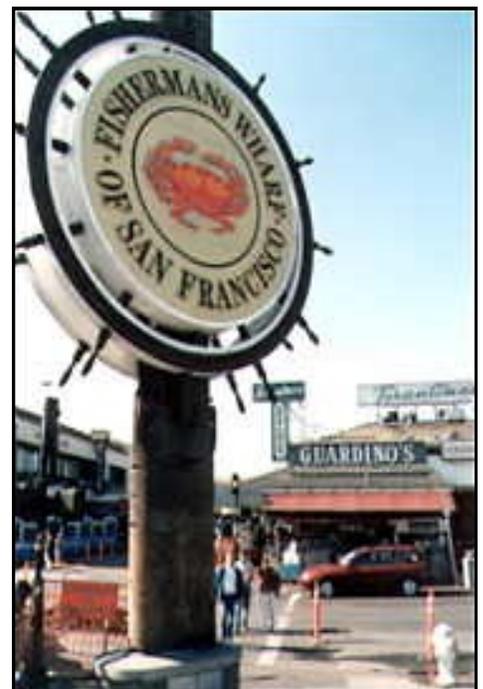
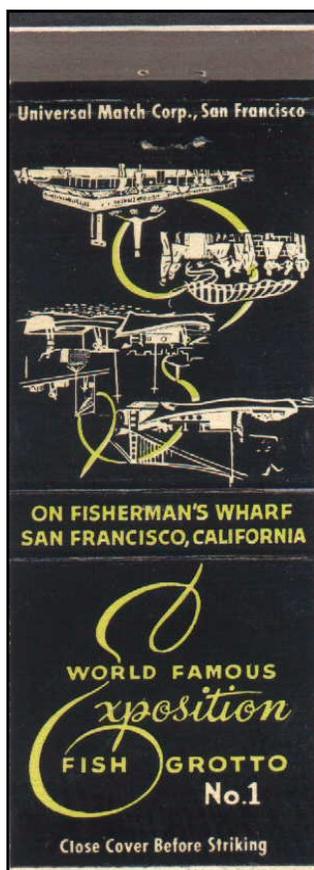
by
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Those who visit San Francisco inevitably come away with memories...*some good...some bad*, but they never fail to recall with pleasure their stroll along this city's historic Fisherman's Wharf. Here they can peer down at the fishing craft gently riding in the calm water, or pause to watch fishermen mending a net and listen to shouted exchanges between these hardy sailors.

From the days of the Gold Rush until the turn of the century, the San Francisco fishing fleet was composed of lateen-rigged sailboats. They were copies of the craft which the Italian fishermen knew in their native land. Green was the prevailing color of the tiny boats, and the name of a patron saint appeared on the hull. The fishermen themselves were as colorful as their craft. Their natural talent for song was to be heard in renditions of arias from Verdi, lusty if not always true to the ear. In the fog-shrouded waters outside the Golden Gate, the singing was a means of communication. You could not see a companion boat, but you knew it was there.

The "second-generation" of fishing boats came with the introduction of gasoline engines; small but dependable "put-puts". What became known as the Monterey Hull boats came into general use. The gas engine made it possible to fish more days of the year, gave a wider range for their operation in the ocean water and provided power to haul in the nets or lines.

Even today, several hundred of the Monterey-type boats remain as a part of the fishing fleet. Often likened to the "vintage" automobiles of the Model-T era, the



Monterey Hull craft ride at harbor alongside a "third generation" of commercial fishing boats; diesel-powered craft which overshadow them in size; cruising capacity and are often equipped with two-way radio telephones and "sonar" depth-finders.

In those older days, the fishermen got their news about the weather from Nature instead of a radio report. If the moon was in the east, the tide was coming in; or if in the west, the tide was flowing out the Golden Gate. A circle around the moon meant rain. Porpoises playing around the boat indicated a bad wind was brewing. Old timers around Fisherman's Wharf have other tales to tell, recalled from the period of the last sailboats. It was hard work. If the boat was becalmed, they waited long hours for a breeze, or got out the oars and rowed. Sometimes they would throw a grappling hook into the rudder chain of a passing steamer and get an easy ride home. When the steamer crews called out imprecations against these marine hitchhikers, the Italian fishermen screamed right back in words that soon became a part of waterfront "lingo".

In those earlier periods the favorite fishing spots were outside the Golden Gate, just beyond the waves breaking on the rocks and sandy beaches. It took great skill to manage the boats so they did not drift ashore and be wrecked. In terms of money, the rewards were very low, if today's standards of value are to serve as a measure. The average fisherman made \$2 or \$3 a week, sometimes as much as \$5. But, on the other hand a loaf of bread could be bought for less than five cents, and good red wine came from grapes that could be purchased for \$5 a ton.

Today, as in the past, it is the fishing fleet, operated by the grandsons and great-grandsons of these past generations, which make Fisherman's Wharf a place of activity; the center of an ocean-oriented industry beloved by native San Franciscans and visitors alike. But, it's just not the fisherman and their boats that make the wharf so quaint and picturesque. Restaurateurs would argue that it's the world famous restaurants of the Wharf— such as A. Sabella's, Alioto's, and Nonna Rose Trattoria. The restaurants have traditionally provided the great majority of covers from Fisherman's Wharf, especially the long-established ones, such as A. Sabella's and Alioto's. And that's certainly not all...How about the Wax Museum? Yes, it's an expensive tourist rip-off...but it's interesting! (\$12.95!) Hey, come on, they just added five new figures (Nicole Kidman, Angelina Jolie, Madonna, Lance Armstrong, and Jack Nicholson). What more could you ask for?

So, let's see...we have salty ol' fishermen with their boats and bawdy stories...we have outstanding restaurants for those of us who love to eat...we have famous inarticulate wax people...Hey! How could I forget the Wharf's most famous and most loved residents?...The sea lions! Their barking, their play, and they're endless begging for food has had Wharf visitors enthralled for over a hundred years. It's worth the trip over to the Wharf just to hang out and watch them for awhile, especially for the kids...and these are 'wild' sea lions; they're not seeing ones in any type of captivity.

Well, are you satisfied with your day at the Wharf so far? Doesn't matter...We've got more! The Wharf has an Aquatic Park at one end and famous Pier 39 at the other. The Aquatic Park is the home of San Francisco's Dolphin Club (for swimmers)...but we're not just talking pools, here! You can work your way up to the Golden Gate and Alcatraz swims! *[I thought it was impossible to swim to or from Alcatraz?]*. Pier 39 is a great place to watch the sail boats, cruise ships and cargo ships pass by on San Francisco Bay. Pier 39 is also about as close as you can get to Alcatraz Island without getting on a boat. And all of this is chronicled in matchcovers, thankfully already issued, so visit Fisherman's Wharf...and be sure and bring plenty of money!

Fishermans_Wharf.html

[facts and photo courtesy of <http://www.inetours.com/Pages/SFNbrhds/>