



BAY WATCH

It's long since stolen the East Coast's crown as the epicenter of the US tech industry, but there's more to this "Paris of the West" than Silicon Valley. Longtime resident Joseph Abbati takes us on a tour of San Francisco, a city on the up

PHOTOGRAPHY JEN SISKA

As a San Francisco resident of 36 years, I have never been so amazed at the growth of the city as I am right now. Luxury condos and high-rises are sprouting up everywhere as an influx of ambitious minds, all looking for their pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, are energizing the city with a feeling that this is *the* place to be.

In the mid-19th century it was gold that "rushed" into San Francisco's economy, establishing the city's preeminence on the West Coast. Today's rush is driven largely by the "silicon dollar" and is bringing entrepreneurs and venture capital together to develop the new technologies shaping our 21st-century way of life.

San Francisco is often compared to European cities for its cafe culture, boutique-lined streets, and – at only seven miles across – ease of walking. But while Victorian homes still provide a glimpse of the past and the hills offer million-dollar views over the bay, the landscape is changing. Like the island of Manhattan, the only place to go now is up, and to build in previously overlooked areas such as South of Market.

Patrick Barber, president of Pacific Union, an affiliate of Christie's International Real Estate, observes: "People such as Millennium Partners, who built the Four Seasons

condo/hotel project, were the first to take that risk of going to the other side of Market Street with a very high-end product and it opened up the floodgates." Wealthy Asian, Canadian, Russian, and European nationals – often with children attending major universities here – have bought into these kinds of brands as desirable investments.

HASHTAG: WHERE THE MONEY'S GOING

The formerly East Coast-centric tech industry has not only brought innovation but also wealth. Zackary Wright, a Senior Vice President at Christie's International Real Estate, refers to the new economy: "I just read statistics showing that San Francisco has surpassed Los Angeles in the number of high-net-worth individuals. That's all driven by the tech industry." To lure talent to the city, Barber believes, "Companies like Google, Salesforce, and Twitter realized that if they wanted the very best, the very best want to be in San Francisco. They're all making mega campuses here now."

The new wealth has not changed the environmentally conscious lifestyle, however. "Consumption here in the Bay Area is more 'European' in style," says Alf Nucifora of the Luxury Marketing Council, a global community of CEOs and

CMOs setting the "gold standard" in the field of luxury marketing. "It's a quite introspective consumption. It's not important to buy a Bentley; it's more important to spend \$6,000 to attend a TED conference in Long Beach." The new millionaire techie is likely to be driving a hybrid or an all-electric Tesla luxury car, produced in the Bay Area – or taking a cab ordered on Uber, which was launched here.

To feel the beating heart of the city when visiting, head downtown where five-star offerings of the Taj Campton Place, Mandarin Oriental, Four Seasons, or St Regis near Union Square all await – with the premier shopping area within walking distance. At his eponymous restaurant, Michael Mina – one of only a few chefs to have been awarded four stars by the *San Francisco Chronicle* at multiple restaurants – serves what has been described as a "decadent" menu, with dishes such as ribbons of squid on avocado slices with kombu and Osetra caviar. Mina has also just launched Locale Market, a restaurant in collaboration with chef Don Pintabona, formerly of Robert De Niro's Tribeca Grill.

For a more sedate San Francisco experience, retreat to Nob Hill and stay at the Fairmont San Francisco, the InterContinental Mark Hopkins, or The Ritz-Carlton hotels. >>



Left to right: High-end dining at Quince; the restaurant's bar; "treasures and oddities" at Paxton Gate; taking a stroll in Hayes Valley; Smitten ice cream, Hayes Valley; the critically acclaimed Tosca Cafe in North Beach, AKA "Little Italy."

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Eating options in the area include the Big 4 Restaurant at the Huntington, a swanky old-world institution serving traditional American dishes, and Michelin one-starred Keiko à Nob Hill, which turns out a Japanese-influenced French 12-course menu by chef Keiko Takahashi.

Other distinctive neighborhoods in which to savor the local flavor and coziness of San Francisco include North Beach (the “Little Italy” of the city) next to Jackson Square. The original Barbary Coast area, it’s now home to antique shops, galleries, and fine dining. North Beach is best known as the home of the Beat Generation and City Lights bookstore, where Alan Ginsberg published *Howl* and famously overturned free-speech limitations. Resident hot spot Tosca Cafe was recently voted fourth best new restaurant in the country by *Bon Appétit* magazine. It’s a classic spot where the likes of Norman Mailer and Hunter S Thompson found sanctuary while listening to an eclectic jukebox that plays anything from opera to Patsy Cline. Be sure to try the house “cappuccino” – warm chocolate ganache, organic milk, bourbon, and brandy.

For exquisite, high-end dining, try Quince in Jackson Square or sister restaurant (and next-door neighbor) Cotogna, which serves a rustic Italian-inspired menu. Follow dinner

with a nightcap at Bix, a hidden gem tucked away on a quiet alley with a great bar and a supper-club ambience.

Saturday morning is the best time to visit the Ferry Plaza Farmers’ Market, along the waterfront, and to really enjoy the tastes of San Francisco from the best local organic farmers. Inside the Ferry Building you will also find specialized local food retailers and restaurants such as artisan cheese shop Cowgirl Creamery, Hog Island Oyster Co., and Far West Fungi, purveyor of wild mushrooms and truffles.

THE HEIGHTS OF LUXURY

Nearby are the well-to-do neighborhoods of Pacific Heights, Presidio Heights, and Sea Cliff – a residential enclave overlooking the Pacific Ocean west of the Golden Gate Bridge. Wealth has long gravitated towards these areas; in fact, the elegant Pacific Heights is known for its “Billionaire’s Row” with mansions selling for \$3,250 per square foot. “You have a limited supply of the magnificent homes in Pacific Heights that many of the ultra-wealthy seek – those are appreciating at an even faster rate,” says Wright. Here, Fillmore and Union Streets provide shopping and eating options. Rose’s Café is the perfect spot for a casual brunch – the house-made breads

and pastries are too good to pass up. SPQR is a Californian-style restaurant inspired by Italian cuisine, where Matthew Accarrino, “a mad genius of handmade pasta,” was named one of 2014’s best new chefs by *Food & Wine*. Harry’s Bar has been a neighborhood landmark for more than 35 years. Dark mahogany wood, leather, and antique brass create a comfortable yet elegant atmosphere.

The Marina District has million-dollar waterfront homes with Golden Gate Bridge views. The neighborhood also houses Fort Mason, a former military complex overlooking the San Francisco Yacht Club that hosts cultural museums, a farmers’ market, and Art Market San Francisco (April 29-May 3, 2015). Crissy Field, the adjacent conservation area along the bay, provides a healthy retreat for joggers, cyclists, windsurfers, dog walkers, and naturalists. Nearby Chestnut Street is the shopping district with restaurants like Circa, a popular eatery by day and chic lounge by night for young professionals, and Bistro Aix on Steiner Street, the locals’ choice for a relaxed setting serving organic international flavors.

An emerging and exciting neighborhood is Hayes Valley. It’s the dining area for opera, symphony, and ballet patrons,

as well as those visiting the new SFJAZZ Center. The hot new restaurant and bar here is Monsieur Benjamin, which takes its inspiration from the great Parisian bistro culture. Propeller, a modern furnishings store, has exclusive American and European collections while Octavia Street holds hip micro shops like AETHERSf clothing (housed in multilevel shipping containers), Smitten (made-to-order ice cream), and the outdoor Biergarten (German beers).

The Mission District, traditionally a Latino and somewhat “edgy” neighborhood, has seen unprecedented growth. “The Mission has been unbelievably hot the past four years,” notes Barber. When Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg bought a home there, prices spiked up to \$1,400 per square foot. Valencia Street is home to hipsters and techies, and a flourishing retail, restaurant, and bar scene. For one-off souvenirs, Paxton Gate is a shop of treasures and oddities inspired by the garden and natural sciences. Food-wise, Foreign Cinema restaurant continues to be much loved for its Californian/Mediterranean menu, separate Lazlo cocktail bar, and films projected in the covered outdoor dining patio. Favorite restaurants like Flour + Water might be difficult to get a table at (so be sure to book before you visit), but the simple, authentic Italian menu »



Clockwise from above: Boutique shopping in the Mission District; garden inspiration at the Mission's Paxton Gate; interior accessories in fashionable Hayes Valley.



secures its place on many best-restaurant lists. Serving upscale South Indian food, Dosa also offers an exotic cocktail menu, heavy on Indian spices and flavors.

One part of the city's new growth that has left a void is the redevelopment of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, which has temporarily closed to make way for the Snohetta-designed expansion. The museum will house the Doris and Donald Fisher Collection of contemporary and modern art, one of the greatest private collections, including more than 1,100 works by American and European artists from the 20th and 21st centuries. Until it reopens in 2016, highlight events for 2015 include the early fall annual gala openings of the San Francisco Opera, Ballet, and Symphony. Before then, Chinese artist Ai Weiwei has taken over parts of Alcatraz Island for his politically charged installation @Large (until April 26).

For the alternative crowd, Burning Man is an institution. The Labor Day week-long retreat started in San Francisco in 1986 and is now held in Black Rock Desert, northern Nevada. Once known as a "wild happening" where hippies and artists converged to get stoned and make art, it has now become a networking destination with billionaires such as Google founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page arriving via private jet at luxury desert camps fully staffed with cooks, masseuses, and assistants, all cheek by jowl with ramshackle tents. More proof that the evolution of this great pioneer city is as strong and innovative as it always was. ●

Joseph Abbati is a creative director and consultant based in San Francisco.

ON THE MARKET

Hot neighborhoods, hot properties

2724 Pacific Avenue

One of San Francisco's most renowned properties, this mansion (below) represents the best of city living. Enjoying an extraordinary lot on two parcels in Pacific Heights, with a 92-foot frontage and bay views, the home has eight bedrooms, seven full baths, and 13,500 square feet of living space with period features throughout.

\$21,750,000

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2187 California Street

This grand Victorian property boasts a handsome double parlor with bay window, a formal dining room, and an attractive, bright kitchen, as well as four bedrooms on the upper floor – including the master suite with access to a deck. On the lower level, a large central sitting room leads to a spacious family room or guest suite, which opens out to a landscaped and partly decked yard. This impressive home, complete with two-car garage, has southern outlooks and is conveniently located near Lafayette Park.

\$4,000,000

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