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# Image

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*Mascara Forest No. 6, Kathy Aoki*



*Fascinating  
Visions*

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Casebolt Mansion

**COWS IN SAN FRANCISCO?** You bet. Back in the Gold Rush era, between 1861 and the 1870s, 30 dairies and more than 800 cows lived in this interesting neighborhood. Hence, the name “Cow Hollow.”

Less known to visitors than other areas of San Francisco, like Fisherman’s Wharf and the Embarcadero, Cow Hollow, a San Francisco neighborhood, bordered by the Presidio, the Marina, Pacific Heights, and Russian Hill, offers rich history for visitors to enjoy, enhanced with interesting walks, gorgeous views, a wide variety of restaurants, shopping and friendly neighborhood atmosphere.

The hunter/gatherer Ohlone/Costanoan people were the area’s original residents. When settlers arrived here in the mid-1800s, the area was called Spring Valley. It consisted of sand hills, grassy meadows and a large lagoon fed by fresh water springs. Wildlife abounded, including ducks, quail and rabbits.

Back in Gold Rush days, Union Street, an unpaved road, linked downtown San Francisco with the Presidio, which the Spanish military founded in 1776. The large fresh water lake, Laguna Pequena (“Little Lagoon”), which later was called Washerwoman’s Lagoon, permitted dairy farming and vegetable farms to flourish, supplying the new town of San Francisco with fresh milk and produce. Laundry from the new city’s residents was scrubbed here and hung to dry on the chaparral. Tanneries and meat processing plants sprang up, increasing pollution to the lagoon. In 1890, the board of health banned cows and filled in the lagoon.

However, a magical transformation soon occurred when prosperity from the Gold Rush enabled prominent San Franciscans to settle here, erecting impressive mansions in the 1860s and 1870s, in the ornate Victorian style. In some cases, they bought up the dairy barns, carriage houses and old clapboard buildings and remodeled them into elegant dwellings.

Now that the horses and buggies are gone, the best way to explore this district is on foot. Free walking tours, both guided and self-guided, are regularly available.

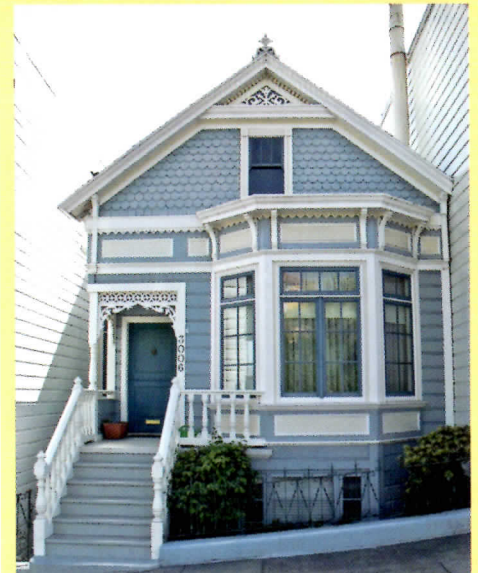
Lively Union Street is Cow Hollow’s main hub. Today the area is popping with its ornate Victorians or Painted Ladies, as they are called historic buildings, chic boutiques, restaurants of a wide variety of international cuisine and comfortable accommodations.

As you stroll down Union Street, it is fun to notice the original house that is often partially

# San Francisco's Cow Hollow

## FROM DAIRY FARMS TO VICTORIAN MANSIONS

By Diane LeBow  
Photography by John Montgomery



Author's Queen Anne Victorian



Terzo Restaurant



hidden behind a restaurant, boutique, or even pizzeria. For example around 1870, James Cudworth, one of Cow Hollow's first dairymen built a three-story mansion at 2040 Union Street. The original house along with its adjoining barn served as a first aid station during the 1906 earthquake and fire and later as a hideout for "the Gas Pipe Thieves," a pair of famous looters. Today it has been transformed into boutiques and restaurants. Nearby at 1980 Union, Mr. Cudworth built a pair of twin Victorians as wedding gifts for his two daughters.

Notice the arched doorway that framed the entrance for a Wells Fargo stage-coach stop in the 1880's, at Terzo's Restaurant (3011 Steiner). Across the street is popular Rose's Café, which once housed an early neighborhood pharmacy. Just off the south side of Union's 1900 block, visit Charlton Court, a charming cul-de-sac which is said to have been a milk-wagon loading yard, with its trio of 1873-1896 Victorians,

The Sherman House (1879) (2160 Green near Fillmore), a Victorian Baroque residence, was built by the founder of Sherman, Clay and Company, a famous San Francisco piano store. In the three story music and reception room which forms one wing of the house, the great Paderewski performed, as well as singers Madame Schumann-Heink and Lotta Crabtree, a neighbor.

One of Cow Hollow's most dramatic, as well as historically interesting dwellings, is the Casebolt House (1851) at 2727 Pierce Street. An Italianate manor house, it was built by a blacksmith from Virginia for his 11 children. He sailed to San Francisco from around Cape Horn and used the ship's huge timbers in the building of their home. His property once included a cow pasture, barn, spring, carriage house, windmill, and even a lake and artificial waterfall.

An unusual building is the Octagon House (1861) at 2645 Gough which is an eight-sided structure topped by a cupola. Now a historic house-museum, it was built following a popular mid-19th century theory that life in an octagon would promote health and happiness.

Another landmark of Cow Hollow is the fanciful Old Vedanta Society Temple (2963 Webster Street at Greenwich). Built between 1905 and 1908 and said to be the first Hindu Temple in the Western Hemisphere, it is an amazing mixture of Moorish columns, arches, onion-shaped domes, crenellated towers, unusual bow windows, and mysterious upstairs terraces. An early pamphlet from the Society says that the Temple "... may be considered a Hindu temple, a Christian church, a Mohammedan mosque and a



TOP TO BOTTOM: Octagon House; Cudworth House; Rose's Café; Vedanta Temple

Hindu ...monastery." Have a look and take your pick!

For continuing proof of Cow Hollow's network of underground springs, take a peek into the quiet courtyard of St. Mary's Church (Union and Steiner) where its Eternal Fountain still draws on underground springs that once watered the district's thirsty cows.

During your stroll, enjoy the gardens and greenery of the district, including sweet-smelling jasmine, colorful bougainvillea, wisteria, wild strawberries and cherry trees. Hummingbirds frequent the gardens while egrets, red-tailed hawks and the famous parrots of Telegraph Hill fly overhead. Cow Hollow's proximity to the Presidio also means that occasional raccoons and even skunks sometimes visit residents.

Architecture, steep hills, and beautiful views have attracted filming crews to the district. Tourists seek out Mrs. Doubtfire's house at 2640 Steiner at Broadway. Some other films made in the area include *Bullitt*, *Princess Diaries*, *Dirty Harry*, and *Vertigo*.

Restaurants, pubs, and cafe-delicatessens keep visitors and locals alike well fed with every type of cuisine, from fresh seafood to Italian and Pan-Asian. On the first weekend in June, the Union Street Art Festival kicks off San Francisco's street festival season with juried exhibitions, food and entertainment.

While you're there, remember nearby neighbors: the Marina's Chestnut Street with its fun shops and cozy restaurants; the Presidio National Park with its, Disney Family Museum, Presidio Inn, hiking, bike riding and free trolley tours; Crissy Field, the Marina Green and Fort Point with their kayaking and kite surfing.

For public transportation from downtown San Francisco's shopping-hotel district, take the No. 45 bus.

Even though the cows are long gone, the author has enjoyed calling her 1890 Queen Anne Victorian in the heart of Cow Hollow home for the past 33 years.

#### IF YOU GO:

- Free walking tours: <http://www.sfcityguides.org/desc.html?tour=14&month=#cal> and
- Self guided walking tour
- The Octagon House is open to the public on the second Sunday and second and fourth Thursdays of each month. Vedanta Temple [www.sfvedanta.org](http://www.sfvedanta.org).

#### SOME ACCOMMODATIONS:

- Union Street Inn (2229 Union) <http://www.unionstreetinn.com/> Edwardian style with a carriage house in the rear.
- Marina Motel (2576 Lombard) was built in the late 1930's by the son of a Gold Rush miner to celebrate the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge
- Hotel del Sol (3100 Webster)

#### SOME FAVORITE RESTAURANTS:

- Brazen Head ■ Isa's ■ Balboa ■ Perry's ■ Belnet
- Pizza Organica ■ Capannina ■ Rose's Café