



A Shining Chain of Fountains

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Fountains are fun! There is something of revelry in splashing water. An innate joy, perhaps, that water is at hand to drink, to wash away dull care, to lave the fevered brow or blistered heel, to cleanse the ravages of time.

The poet John Milton thought elves frolicked beside fountains at midnight. "A fountain and a shrine" were two of the things for which Edgar Allan Poe said his "soul doth pine." Scientists today, much less ethereal, tell us that the splash of water releases negative ions that make us feel good.

In other words, if you want to lift your spirits, stand beside a fountain. Fortunately, San Francisco has some choice ones. The best concentration of them is near the waterfront between Pacific Avenue and Market Street.

To make this fountain walk, transport yourself, preferably by public transportation, to Sidney J. Walton Park, the somewhat private square bounded by Front, Jackson and Davis streets and the new Pacific Avenue Mall. Muni buses No. 42 and No. 83 come within one block of this urbane little park.

At Front Street, mid-block between Pacific and Jackson, approach the Columbo arch, salvaged as a memento of the old produce district, which occupied this site until the 1950s. Before you go through the arch, look across the street where once-seedy commission houses of the same era have been nicely renovated into offices.

As you stroll along the meandering park path, look to your left to see how Fisher-Friedman Associates, architects of the Golden Gateway Commons, which borders the park on two sides, used the arch as a design element above the street-level colonnade. Reminiscent of old Western frontier towns, the colonnade roof shelters al fresco diners at the new sidewalk cafes here.

Nearer at hand, the sculptured berms of earth are studded every weekday lunch hour with brownbaggers. The Druids' circle of tall poplar trees on the right surrounds a simple stone monument to businessman Sidney J. Walton, an early advocate of redevelopment for whom the park is named.

A few more steps bring one to Francois Stahly's "Fountain of the Four Seasons," which is also a clock. Residents in the Golden Gateway Towers can tell time from it in two ways. Like the gnomon of a sundial, the passing of the sun throws shadows of the four tall spires on the 12 outer stones. Linger as long as you like by this useful and ornamental fountain.

When you are ready to continue, stroll toward the corner of Pacific and Davis. Cross Davis to discover that Pacific Path replaces the street with lawn and trees. Follow the concrete walkway as it meanders between two of The Commons buildings. First-floor offices look out into this intimate garden-like space and its sculptured "Portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe" by Marasol.

In a few more steps you parallel another unusual fountain. This one, backed by the wall of a stairwell, was created by Claire Falkenstein. It depicts a free-form ship, recalling a time when this area was the waterfront graveyard of more than 500 sailing ships abandoned in 1849 when their crews headed for the gold mines.

Continue on the path, turning right on Drumm Pathway when you reach the fenced tennis courts. At the Jackson Street corner, turn left and continue one block to Maritime Plaza, the public park under the Embarcadero Freeway.

Cross both Washington and Drumm streets, noting how quiet the traffic above seems from this aspect. Designed to use this open space well, the park will continue to look good whether or not the city decides to raze the freeway, but the skeletal orange structure on the east side of Drumm would be improved by vines.

When you reach Clay Street, turn right and there is a very welcome public drinking fountain, rare indeed in our time and

used by the many office workers who jog here during lunch hours.

Walk into the park diagonally toward your right and climb the stairs past its several landings until you reach the "park in the sky" that underlies the Alcoa Building.

Go around the smaller building to locate what may be the most popular fountain in the city. Designed by Robert Woodward, it has been nicknamed "the dandelion" because its water sprays resemble the upper half of that flower in seed. Enjoy the susurrus of its many radiating spouts as the water mists onto cobbles below, salvaged from nearby streets.

Then go under the Corbusier- inspired Alcoa building for a look at the dramatic works of art in the grassy courts surrounding the building.

Henry Moore's 12-foot-tall "Standing Figure, Knife-Edged," John Marini's bronze "Horse," Charles Perry's "Icospiral" and "Limits of Horizon II" by Jan Peter Stern are all part of San Francisco's remarkable public art collection and, like those in the adjoining Embarcadero Center, well worth a walk anytime.

Take the westernmost footbridge across Clay Street. It brings you into Embarcadero One, where Willi Gutmann's "Two Columns With Wedge" stands in its own reflecting pool. If the three pieces of the 82-foot-tall stainless-steel sculpture were joined, they would form a single tube.

Each of the square inner courts of the tall office buildings, designed by architect John Portman, has a comparable reflecting pool. Look over the vines behind the benches to see the pool three stories below.

In Embarcadero Two, the showpiece is "Chronos XIV" by Nicholas Schoffer. Louise Nevelson's "Sky Tree" adorns the reflecting pond in Embarcadero Three.

In Embarcadero Four, Portman's own sculpture, "The Tulip," has both a fountain and a spiral pedestrian ramp that descends over the reflecting pond. All are great scene-stealers, and this week they serve as backdrops for a more transient art.

As part of a "Spring Week" celebration, four aspects of Golden Gate Park have been recreated at the center. One display focuses on the Park Reforestation Project, one on Strybing Arboretum, one on the Japanese Tea Garden and the fourth on the Conservatory of Flowers.

Take the escalator down to street level and turn east, following Commercial Street all the way through to Embarcadero Four, to see them all.

When you reach that unmistakable spiral ramp and the tinkling fountain surrounding "The Tulip," which has become Embarcadero center's identifying logo, climb the ramp as high as you can.

You will emerge on the podium level. Look alongside Lily's restaurant for a footbridge and cross it into the lobby of Embarcadero Five, which is also the Hyatt Regency Hotel.

There in the center is the overwhelming "Eclipse" geodesic sphere, whose underlying fountain seems impossibly smooth. "It looks like it is covered in Saran Wrap," I overheard a visitor say. Then she dipped her fingers in the fountain to see whether it was really water.

The Hyatt Regency also has a stylized brook. Walk toward the row of shops on the far side of the "Eclipse" and turn left alongside the trees. They bend over the little stream.

Walk beside the brook to its end. Then go down the stairs at the eastern end of the lobby and exit at Justin Herman Plaza, where you will find the most entertaining fountain of all, Armand Vaillancourt's unique collection of 101 concrete boxes. Sit on the fountain ledge and count the spouts. So subtle is the interplay, this is difficult to do.

To finish this walk with a fillip, be bold. Step out on one of the big square concrete stepping stones in the water. Continue under the spouts until you emerge at the other end. The stones are so well located under the gushers, you won't get wet!

On Saturday, April 12, Margot Patterson Doss will conduct a "Rites of Spring Walk" at 10 a.m. at Embarcadero Center to benefit the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department. Tickets are \$20, and reservations are required. Telephone 772-0585 for reservations.

Caption: PHOTO (2), MAP

PHOTO : (1) a spiral ramp ascends from the fountain at the base of 'the tulip' to the podium level of Embarcadero Four, (2) The 'Fountain of the Four Seasons' is a clock as well as a resting place / PHOTOS BY ERIC LUSE

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