WORDS on PLAYS

INSIGHT INTO THE PLAY, THE PLAYWRIGHT, AND THE PRODUCTION

Armistead Maupin’s
Tales of the City
A New Musical

LIBRETTO BY JEFF WHITTY
MUSIC AND LYRICS BY JAKE SHEARS AND JOHN GARDEN

BASED ON ARMISTEAD MAUPIN’S TALES OF THE CITY AND MORE TALES OF THE CITY

CHOREOGRAPHY BY LARRY KEIGWIN
DIRECTED BY JASON MOORE
AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER
MAY 18–JULY 10, 2011

WORDS ON PLAYS PREPARED BY
ELIZABETH BRODERSEN
PUBLICATIONS EDITOR

DAN RUBIN
PUBLICATIONS & LITERARY ASSOCIATE

MICHAEL PALLER
RESIDENT DRAMATURG

EMILY HOFFMAN
PUBLICATIONS FELLOW

ZACHARY MOULL
DRAMATURGY FELLOW

MADE POSSIBLE BY

KORET FOUNDATION FUNDS
ART WORKS. arts.gov

© 2011 AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER, A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
THE TALES OF THE CITY CIRCLE

COMMISSIONING SPONSORS
Anonymous
Priscilla and Keith Geeslin
Ambassador James C. Hormel and Michael P. Nguyen
Fred M. Levin and Nancy Livingston, The Shenson Foundation
Kathleen Scutchfield
Jeff and Laurie Ubben

PRODUCTION SPONSORS
Ray and Dagmar Dolby
Burt and Deedee McMurtry
Susan A. Van Wagner

MUSIC SPONSORS
Lesley Clement
Michael G. Dovey
Ken Fulk
Nion McEvoy
Lorenzo Thione and David Palmer
Jack and Susy Wadsworth
Carlie Wilmans

CHOREOGRAPHY SPONSORS
Stephen Belford and Bobby Minkler | Carla Emil and Rich Silverstein | Marilee K. Gardner | Jo S. Hurley
Byron R. Meyer | Mr. Milton J. Mosk and Mr. Thomas E. Foutch | David and Carla Riemer
Anne and Rick Riley | Laila Tärraf | Larry and Robyn Varellas | Nola Yee

CASTING SPONSORS
Anonymous | Paul Angelo | Lucia Brandon | David and Carla Crane | Carlotta and Robert Dathe
Jerome L. and Thao N. Dodson | Roberta and David Elliott | Drs. Caroline Emmett and Russell Rydel
Kirke and Nancy Hasson | The Reverend and Mrs. Alan Jones | John Osterweis and Barbara Ravizza
Toby and Sally Rosenblatt | Gerald B. Rosenstein | Jeff and Maria Spears | Frank Stein and Paul May
Bert Steinberg | Jack Weeden and David Davies | Beverly and Loring Wyllie

SCENIC SPONSORS
Christian and Jacqueline Erdman | Robert Spoor | Brian and Ayn Thorne
Dr. Damon M. Walcott | Tim M. Whalen

SUPPORTERS
Anonymous | Lloyd and Janet Cluff | Julia and Kevin Hartz | Jason M. Surles | Mr. and Mrs. Bruce White

PRESENTED BY

SPONSORED BY

American Airlines
ART WORKS.
FAIRMONT
SAN FRANCISCO
FOGGY BRIDGE
KORET FOUNDATION
pillsbury
Kenneth Rainin Foundation
San Francisco Chronicle | SFGate.com
Wiltshire Capital
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Characters and Cast of Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City: A New Musical

2. Finding Atlantis: An Interview with the Creators of Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City: A New Musical
   by Elizabeth Brodersen

18. Director Jason Moore on Tales of the City: Excerpts from Remarks Made to A.C.T. Cast, Creative Team, Staff, and Donors, April 11, 2011

20. Building 28 Barbary Lane: An Interview with Scenic Designer Douglas W. Schmidt
   by Zachary Moull

27. “Mysteriously Garbed As a Nun”: An Interview with Costume Designer Beaver Bauer
   by Zachary Moull

34. A Long Way to Travel: Armistead Maupin's Journey to Himself
   by Michael Paller

43. The Tapestry of Humanity: Armistead Maupin and the Gay Literary Tradition
   by Emily Hoffman

49. A City of “Mysterious and Magnificent Personality”: San Francisco in 1976 (and Before)
   by Dan Rubin

60. The Lost City of Atlantis
   by Dan Rubin

64. A Tales of the City Timeline: 1976–77

67. A Guide to People, Places, Drugs, and Other Miscellanea Found in Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City: A New Musical

82. For Further Information . . .
Storyboards for Armistead Maupin’s Tales of the City: A New Musical by scenic designer Douglas W. Schmidt
CHARACTERS AND CAST OF ARMISTEAD MAUPIN’S
TALES OF THE CITY: A NEW MUSICAL

Armistead Maupin’s Tales of the City: A New Musical was first workshopped during the 2009 National Music Theater Conference at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center in Connecticut. Two a.c.t. workshops followed in 2010, the first in New York City and the second in San Francisco. The world premiere production of Armistead Maupin’s Tales of the City: A New Musical opened at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, California, May 18, 2011.

CHARACTERS AND CAST
(in alphabetical order)

MONA RAMSEY       Mary Birdsong
JON FIELDING       Josh Breckenridge
NORMAN NEAL WILLIAMS Manoel Felciano
MOTHER MUCCA       Diane J. Findlay
ANNA MADRIGAL      Judy Kaye
DEDE HALCYON-DAY   Kathleen Elizabeth Monteleone
EDGAR HALCYON      Richard Poe
BRIAN HAWKINS       Matthew Saldívar
BEAUCHAMP DAY       Andrew Samonsky
MICHAEL “MOUSE” TOLLIVER Wesley Taylor
MARY ANN SINGLETON  Betsy Wolfe
OTHER DENIZENS OF SAN FRANCISCO Keith A. Bearden, Jessica Coker, Kristoffer Cusick, Kimberly Jensen, Alex Hsu, Patrick Lane, Stuart Marland, Pamela Myers, Julie Reiber, Josh Walden

SETTING

SYNOPSIS
Armistead Maupin’s Tales of the City: A New Musical is based on the novels Tales of the City (1978) and More Tales of the City (1980), which collect columns written by Maupin that appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle between May 1976 and May 1977. As the script was still evolving when Words on Plays went to print, no synopsis has been included.
The new musical version of Armistead Maupin’s immortal *Tales of the City* that opened at A.C.T. this spring was five intensely creative years in the making. During that time, despite the demands of their own individual artistic careers, the four original collaborators—playwright Jeff Whitty (*Avenue Q*), composer/lyricists Jake Shears and John Garden (both of Scissor Sisters), and director Jason Moore (*Avenue Q* and *Shrek: The Musical*)—found time in their hectic schedules to come together for a series of developmental workshops and readings, as well as hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of writing/composing sessions, casting auditions, design meetings, and conference calls, all focused on giving theatrical life to some of the most beloved characters in American popular literature. In April, just four days after the final phase of rehearsals for the world premiere production began at A.C.T., they sat down with us to reflect on the timeless universality of Maupin’s *Tales* and the process of recreating his Atlantean bohemia on the American Conservatory Theater stage.

**SO HOW DID THIS ALL BEGIN? I READ, JEFF, THAT YOUR PARTNER TOLD YOU TO WATCH THE TALEST OF THE CITY MINISERIES DURING A TRANSATLANTIC FLIGHT.**

**JEFF WHITTY:** Yes, on April 22, 2006—almost exactly five years ago—I took a plane to London for *Avenue Q* casting, and Steve said I should watch the *Tales of the City* DVDs. But I’d read the books in 1993 and loved them so much I didn’t want to. Then I thought, “Oh, what the hell.” [The movies] are very close to the books structurally, and they begin the way the books begin, with Mary Ann telling her mother that she’s not coming back to Cleveland, that she’s going to stay and live in San Francisco. And I thought, “That’s how a musical begins—a character entering this new world.” The more I watched, the more excited I got, and basically I landed in London and shot off an email to start inquiring about whether the rights were available to do a musical.

**AND ARMISTEAD APPROVED THE IDEA? HE’D SEEN AVENUE Q, I BELIEVE.**

**WHITTY:** Yes. I met with him in June of 2006, and we hit it off famously. That was really the first big step, getting Armistead’s blessing to move forward. I knew then that it would
be a huge project. I’m not sure I quite realized how huge it would turn out to be (laugh), but it was very exciting to think of doing a musical with several intertwining stories. For years [after Avenue Q] I’d been saying no to musicals, because they didn’t excite me, but this project excited me for all kinds of reasons, mostly because I just loved the books so much, and the characters.

THEN DID YOU GO TO JAKE SHEARS FIRST, OR TO JASON MOORE?

WHITTY: I knew that I wanted to work with Jason, because we had survived Avenue Q together. (Laughter) We’d developed a working relationship, where we’d moved past a lot of the communication issues you can have with strangers, and so I knew his sensibility was good and I knew how excellent he is at developing new works, and rigorous—that’s one of our key words—dramaturgically. I made this soundscape, a CD of songs that I thought sounded like the show. It was all 1970s music, except that I included some tracks from the Scissor Sisters, because it just felt right. We were going around and around with composers, and there weren’t that many exciting ideas, except for the Scissor Sisters. And then it occurred to me—I’d known Jake for years at this point, so I just shot him an email . . . What did I say in the email?

JAKE SHEARS: “I’ve got this idea for making a show that’s really kind of queer and fun and takes place in the ’70s and has trannies and would you be interested?” (Laughter) I said, “Sure! Tell me more.” And he wrote back and said, “It’s Tales of the City.” I think I must have responded immediately.

WHITTY: You did.
Oct 3, 2006, 11:43 PM
Hi darling --

It’s Jeff Whitty. Your new album is fantastic. My congratulations to you. I’ve received more

gasps than I can account for by telling people, languidly, “Oh, yes, I saw the Scissor Sisters
when they were playing at The Cock.” I just beam and beam at your success.

I’m in the country right now. Donaghy is comin’ to town for a spell!

Listen -- I have a question. Are you still interested in writing a musical? I’m getting the rights
to a classic tale set in the 70’s, and I wanted to float the idea past you. From a storytelling
perspective, it’s Les Miserables in scale, but with polyamory, drugs, joy, and death. Faggots,
Lesbians, straight boys, straight girls, transgendered heroines and innocent girls straight off
the bus from Ohio.

I have no doubt that your life is insane right now -- but when you’re able to come up for air,
don’t be a stranger.

Love Jeff

10/9/06 7:57 PM
Hey Jeff --

Just got your email... sorry its days later.
Thanks for the compliment, it means a lot.
I would love to check out what you are doing...
Maybe we could have a phone conversation?
I’ve got to clear out my voice mail box...
This looks like a poem, don’t it?
Maybe it is.
Lettuce.
Love J

Oct 9, 2006, 7:24 PM
Queen --
You got back to me astonishingly fast, all things considered!
Do you want to do a formal scheduled call type thingie? If not, just call my cell whenever. I’m
around all week without much scheduled except a play here and there. I’m usually up til 2 or so.

By the way, I don’t know why I was being so coy: I’m getting the rights to “Tales of the City”
and Armistead Maupin is really excited about the idea. I visited him in San Francisco and at our
first meeting we got baked within ten minutes and giggled for six hours.

Anyhoo.
xxooJeff

10/10/06 9:51 PM
Hey Jeff --

Thank you for getting my heart racing. I was just kicked back, watching the Late Show star-
ring Art Carney and Lily Tomlin. Whoa. Sometimes curiosity doesn’t pay. Your e-mail actually
got my heart pounding, which could mean nothing but good things. I’m in Chicago and will try
you at 1ish my time. 2ish yours.

Hope you are well.
Love J
Shears: I just knew, I'm in. I grew up with the books—I read them when I was 13 or 14—and they mean a lot to me. I remember my heart started racing. There was a little voice in my head saying, “This could be too much, you don't really know what you're doing.” But there was no way I would say no.

You had performed in musicals before?

Shears: In high school. Not in a long time.

Jason Moore: Who did you play?

Shears: I was Sky Masterson [in Guys and Dolls].

Moore: No you were not.

(Huge laughter)

Shears: And I was Baby John in West Side Story.

Moore: It all makes sense now!

Shears: So the idea really excited me. I knew it was going to be a challenge and that I wouldn't totally know what I was doing, but I knew I'd figure it out. Once I said yes, the Scissors were on the road [touring with Ta-Dah], and [John Garden and I] just started writing songs. I reread all the books immediately, and then we started writing songs backstage while we were touring.

Moore: Do you remember what were the first couple songs you wrote?

Shears: “Plus One” was the first song.

John Garden: We were somewhere in the U.K., I think it might have been Wembley Arena, backstage, and Jake just said, “Grab a keyboard.” I said, “What are we doing?” and he said, “Writing a musical.” (Laughter) I said, “Great!” and we went into this . . . when I say shower cubicle, it was one of those shower cubicles that a whole rugby team will shower in. It was a big, tiled room. We just literally had an electric piano and a laptop and wrote “Plus One” in a couple of hours. We recorded it straight in and emailed it off to Jeff and Armistead, and that was it. We’re always laughing about [the fact that] we never actually got the job. We just started writing songs.

Whitty: This is true. There was never a moment of, “You’re hired!” because the score was coming in already.

Shears: I just figured that if we wanted to do it then we needed to start writing songs and not overtalk it.
DID YOU CONSCIOUSLY DRAW ON ANY PARTICULAR MUSICAL INFLUENCES?

Shears: Consciously? I want to say no. My musical styling is always going to go towards a certain vein, I think, a vein that I think fits the show.

DID YOU SET OUT SAYING TO YOURSELF, “THIS IS A ‘MUSICAL,’ SO I HAVE TO WRITE IN A CERTAIN WAY THAT’S DIFFERENT”?

Shears: No, and I think there are a lot of different musical styles that go on in the show. I don’t know if that’s a good thing or a bad thing.

Moore: It’s definitely a good thing. That’s the point of the show: everyone has a voice.

Garden: For me there was definitely a moment when I was trying to box the characters into certain styles, really trying to mark it out, thinking, “Oh, Anna Madrigal’s musical style is from this period, and Mona’s musical style reference is . . . ,” but sometimes that held us back too much, because we ended up writing songs that didn’t actually achieve what they needed to. So we had to let go of that idea, and just wrote whatever came naturally.

Shears: I wanted the songs to have a natural feel. I didn’t want to shape them automatically around a ’70s pastiche.

I’VE READ IT DESCRIBED AS A “DISCO-INFUSED” SCORE, BUT IT FEELS LIKE IT’S SO MUCH MORE.

Shears: There are club scenes [in the books], so we had to go write a disco song. But there’s very little disco in it, actually. Also, it’s on the opposite end of the spectrum from a jukebox musical.

You and Jeff have both been quoted as expressing admiration for Sondheim’s work. Clearly this isn’t Sondheim, musically, but I do
SEE IN YOUR MUSIC FOR TALES A SIMILAR SENSE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, AN INTEGRATION OF THE MUSIC WITH THE CHARACTERS AND THE STORY.

Shears: There’s just so much that the songs need to get across to move the story along. There’s not really any real estate or breaks where you can just throw in a brainless pop song.

Moore: I think that’s why you and John are naturals for musicals, because with each song you have chosen to dramatize a specific moment: If DeDe’s freaking out because she’s pregnant, it sounds like this. If you’re telling the story of the lost city of Atlantis, it sounds like this. It’s kind of a natural instinct for you.

WHILE JAKE AND JOHN GOT THE MUSIC GOING, JEFF, WHAT CHALLENGES WERE YOU FACING?

Whitty: I was wrestling with how to put all these stories into a musical with a dramatic structure, because Armistead writes in this wonderful way where there’s never really a clear ending. The story keeps thrusting forward, especially in the first books. But in a piece of theater you do have to have a clear ending. You can’t say, “Come back in five years for the next Tales of the City musical!”

SO YOU WERE HUNTING FOR THAT MOMENT IN THE BOOKS?

Whitty: No, it was all about restructuring, and trying to make [the book of the musical] feel like Armistead’s storytelling style, which I love so much, and it’s the flavor of Tales of the City in so many ways. I wanted to find a way to keep that, but then also have the whole piece be cohesive and feel like it’s flowing forward in a very clear way, so it leads logically to the end of the show. I had a 180-page draft of the script, which is about three and a half hours, and we had demo recordings of probably about 20 songs at that point. So [in March 2008] we did a cold read in Jason’s apartment, with actors who had never seen the script before; we read through the script and pressed “play” on the demo recordings. I think if I hadn’t been through that before it would have been horrifying, but for me it was wonderful because so much became clear. I immediately cut out a couple of story lines. (To Jake) What were your impressions of that reading?

Shears: I wanted to shoot myself. (Laughter)

Moore: It was a tough day, but it was the only way to move forward. (To Jeff) Wasn’t it all just spinning in your head because you’d been working on the puzzle for so long? You needed to put it outside of yourself, so you could see it.
Whitty: It’s like you’re sculpting in the dark, and these experiences of workshops and readings, as painful as they can be sometimes, are like flipping on the lights, and you say, “Oh my god, that’s not what I meant at all!” (Laughter) Then the lights can go back off and you continue sculpting in the dark.

Shears: It was my first experience with anything like that. I mean, we’d put in a lot of work up to that point—there was a script written, and 20 songs. And at the end of that read-through, it just felt like a complete mess.

Garden: I think what I really noticed was when a song just stopped the action completely. There are some songs—like “Homosexual Convalescent Center”—where it’s fine if things stop, because it’s a fun thing. But that was my experience with that first reading, that it felt like, oh, everything suddenly ground to a halt for this song, and then we’d come back into the movement of the plot. I think that was when we went away and started thinking more about how to get from A to B by the end of certain songs.

Whitty: Incidentally, Mary Birdsong [who plays Mona in the production] was at that reading. We just asked friends [to read], and I knew Mary from the downtown theater scene, and I thought she’d be funny, not knowing she had her amazing voice and musical chops.

So the next big step after that was the O’Neill Conference in summer 2009?

Whitty: Yes. Jason and I had developed Avenue Q at the O’Neill and knew what a valuable resource it can be. The Avenue Q we left with after the O’Neill didn’t quite resemble the Avenue Q that opened, but it gave us a sense of the storytelling spine that we could work forward from.

Moore: [The Tales workshop at the O’Neill] was really our first time together working as a group. Scheduling has always been hard. But I remember thinking, “Oh, right, this group really works well together. This group can figure this out.”

Shears: Because we had fun together. And the O’Neill was magical because there was the space to . . . didn’t we write some new songs there?

Garden: We wrote “No Apologies” there . . . We wrote quite a lot. We’ve written in every workshop so far, including the two we’ve had with A.C.T.

Shears: It was properly thrilling to see people reading and singing the show. I had never heard anybody else sing my songs.
GARDEN: It was incredible to hear those vocal arrangements for the first time. Obviously, when [Scissor Sisters] do demos, [Jake] does all the backing vocals, but there’s such a different quality to hearing 14 people all singing a vocal arrangement of a song that you’ve written. It was amazing.

WHITTY: It’s funny, too, because looking back I realize the O’Neill experience was also an ending of a process for us, because up till the end of that workshop we could really throw anything against the wall and see if it stuck. But once we had a feel for the spine of the show, that’s when the work became really hard, because suddenly the destination was visible, way in the distance, and we had to start being rigorous—that word again—about working toward making a finished piece. So the joyfulness of that creative process ended, and a new process, one of craft, began. I haven’t had fun with Tales of the City until about Monday of this week. (Laughter)

WHAT MADE MONDAY DIFFERENT?

WHITTY: After carrying what felt like this super-heavy backpack of rocks in my psyche, I just woke up on Monday and felt really good and then showed up at rehearsal [at A.C.T.] and realized we have an amazing, lovely, kind, patient cast, and it just felt really good to be here. And that we had done a ton of work, and it was starting to finally manifest.

LET’S TALK ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF THE SHOW A BIT. IS THERE A UNIFYING THEME FOR YOU?

GARDEN: For me—and this is something I’ve learned, being new to the process, from Jake and Jason and Jeff, and everyone—is that what we’re trying to do is entertain first. That’s taught me a lot about making choices musically. The show has always got to be entertaining. Underneath all that there are some themes, but I don’t feel like the idea is to bash people over the head with them. It’s supposed to be just a really fun, entertaining, moving, beautiful show, and that’s where we’re hoping to go with it.
shears: What pops into my head is, you make your own family and you make your own bed. What’s always really interested me about this show is the class system in it, the mirror of these two classes, essentially. There’s a world of bohemia, and there’s a world of this aristocratic upper echelon. They are two worlds that aren’t really supposed to combine, but they do, and [this show is about] the explosion that happens when they do. But if you look at these two “families” as mirrors of one another, you see one that is as connected as it could possibly be, with people really working on those connections, and you see another family that’s completely cut off from each other. That’s how I’ve always pictured it.

moore: I like the “find a family” concept a lot, but I’ve always found myself intellectually and emotionally intrigued by the idea that, if you keep secrets, you are limiting your ability to connect well with other people. It’s a function of the family thing: if you don’t reveal truths you can’t have true friendship or true love, so own who you are and be open about who you are—whether it’s that you’re unhappy in your marriage, or you’re gay, or you’re transsexual. Until you do that you’ll have a barrier between yourself and true love, basically.

whitty: It’s funny, in the early years there were people who would come up with concerned looks and say, “But what is the theme of the show?” I never wanted to box the show into that, because my experience on a lot of things is that the show knows what it is already, and we have to manifest that for the show. It knows what its themes are. I think there are very clear emerging themes, but we learned so much in workshops that the audience tells you. You can tell what the audience is feeling and responding to, and that’s what the show is. That’s where you flesh things out and take the show there.
JEFF, YOU’VE WRITTEN ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE IN THE CREATION OF LIVE THEATER, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVE THEATER IN OUR CULTURE, AND JASON, IT’S CLEAR FROM YOUR PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE THAT THEATER IS VITAL TO YOU. JAKE AND JOHN, WHAT ABOUT YOU? IS LIVE THEATER SOMETHING THAT’S IMPORTANT IN YOUR LIVES? OR IS PERFORMING WITH SCISSOR SISTERS YOUR FORM OF THEATRICAL EXPRESSION?

SHEARS: Well, that, yes. But I’m heavily influenced by the rock musicals I saw growing up. *Rocky Horror Picture Show* was a pivotal moment for me, and I still find it one of the most fascinating pieces ever made. This is super reductive, but I was never a high school theater head. I liked being in plays, but I couldn’t get into *The Music Man*, really. I couldn’t really get into *West Side Story*, or *Guys and Dolls*, even when I was performing in them. I had fun with it, but what really turned me on was when I saw *Tommy* by The Who for the first time, when I saw *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

GARDEN: It’s funny—I’ve never heard you say there are some musicals that don’t really float your boat, and it’s similar for me. I always wondered how easy it would be to write a musical, because I love the way the music works in those shows, and I always listened to a lot of musicals—but again, shows like [The Who’s rock operas] *Tommy* and *Quadrophenia*, those kinds of things are just amazing to me. I was around a theatrical environment a lot growing up, and it always excited me. I’ve always loved that sense of walking into a building and everyone in the building is working towards putting on a show. Everybody. It’s different on tour with the band, because essentially it’s no more than about 20 people that you travel with that are doing the same thing, whereas in theater there’s a sense of that community that all comes together. I love being around it, I love working in it. I just never knew how I would get to work in theater.

SHEARS: One reason why maybe Jeff responded to Scissor Sisters in relation to *Tales of the City*, and [an example of] how musicals have influenced the music that I write with Scissors, is the fact that I write a lot of stuff in character. My favorite songs that I’ve written all come from a particular point of view, some person I’ve made up. And I’ll sing in a particular kind of voice, depending on who that [character] is. That’s why I think, since day one, people have looked at me and the band and said, “You should write a musical.” Because we’ve got that storytelling element in the songs.

LET’S TALK A BIT ABOUT SAN FRANCISCO AND HOW YOU’RE PORTRAYING IT IN THE SHOW. JASON HAS SAID THAT YOU’RE NOT TRYING TO CREATE AN “ARCHAEOLOGICALLY ACCURATE” REPLICA OF 1970S SAN FRANCISCO ON THE
moore: One of the reasons the [Tales of the City] stories are so popular, and the books still sell, and people still watch the miniseries, is because there’s a universality to them. Most musicals have that. So we’re working on a really theatrical, exciting time period and location, but at the same time it also needs to apply anywhere. If [the show] feels too nostalgic it can feel kind of quaint, and not in a good way. I think nostalgia can be great; the show should evoke wonderful memories. But it’s important to make sure that it feels emotionally relevant today. That quality of the Scissor Sisters, that their music evokes the past but also feels very present, is what I’ve been trying to achieve with every design department; for example, there’s the ’70s clothes that you would laugh at, and then there’s the ’70s clothes that you would still wear today, because they’re cool. How do we keep extracting the wonderful essences of that time, and translate them for today, so the show feels both period and modern? We’ve tried to do that with the orchestrations, with the clothes, with the set. There are too many locations to be very literal about the set. Also, we’re in San Francisco, so how are we ever going to portray the city without that feeling of, why are you even trying? Why are you even trying to do the Golden Gate Bridge onstage when it’s right over there? We started down that path, and I thought, “This is not going to work.” So how do we evoke the mood and the mystery and the perspective of the city without getting bogged down in too much detail, in a way that also allows for theatricality and for new ideas? I watched Milk again recently, and it is a wonderful film—but it is archaeological. It feels more real than theatrical to me.

whitty: Artistically, I would give anything to have lived in San Francisco in the ’70s. While we were writing the show, that term “San Francisco values” was being used in the political discussion, mostly by Republicans to describe things that are bad. But for me, San Francisco values, that’s what I live for. I think there’s an openness in San Francisco and a family essence that I really get, even taking the J Church [streetcar line] here [to A.C.T.] every day. I just marvel at it. I think the books, too, have that quality, that sense of community and people helping each other—this sense of a larger group of people whose lives are intertwined. That is timeless. We may refer [in the script] to the Jack Tar Hotel, which no longer exists, but at the same time there’s this wonderful line in the song “Seeds and Stems”: “Tell it to the bums out on Market Street / Share it with the bag ladies on Geary.” [After the performance] the audience will actually step out onto Geary Street. That is why this production is not any kind of out-of-town tryout. I hope this show has a long life somehow, but it will never be as cool as this production.
garden: On a similar vibe, we did a fair amount of research into what people were doing in musical theater in the ’70s, and a lot of it—like Chicago [which opened on Broadway on June 3, 1975]—was nostalgic for the ’20s. So to say we’re writing a “’70s musical” does not mean it’s going to be a “disco musical,” because Stephen Schwartz, Stephen Sondheim, and Kander and Ebb [who all had shows on Broadway in the ’70s], don’t write disco music. So that is kind of archaeologically accurate—that is accurate—but it’s not what you would expect when you say you’re writing a musical set in the ’70s.

DOES THE BAND FOR THIS SHOW HAVE CONVENTIONAL MUSICAL THEATER INSTRUMENTATION, OR IS IT MORE LIKE A ROCK BAND?

moore: It’s comparable to the band in Spring Awakening, with a rock core.

garden: They’ve got to be flexible, but it’s kind of a classic rock band with a couple of horns, really. We’ve talked a lot with the music director and the orchestrator about what instruments, what keyboard, we’re using, so that we don’t end up with something that sounds like conventional Broadway musical theater. There are a lot of sounds commonly used on Broadway, often for expediency, that sonically don’t fit the bill for this show. As
with the Scissors, it’s all about the sound. A lot of what I do with the Scissors onstage is recreate what Jake and Babydaddy do in the studio. Similarly, I’m working with our music director and orchestrator to make sure that we’ve got sounds that have that richness and will evoke the period and serve the songs really well.

**IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE THAT YOU WANT TO COMMUNICATE TO AN AUDIENCE MEMBER WHO WANTS TO UNDERSTAND THE HEART OF THE SHOW?**

garden: Very early on, Jake and I picked a line out of the book where Mrs. Madrigal talks about Atlantis. It’s just a moment, and it passes, but we focused on it and wrote the song about Atlantis. Originally it stuck out like a sore thumb, but as time has passed it has started to tie so many themes of the show together, and it’s a musical idea that keeps returning. It’s actually about returning to a kind of lost city of Atlantis, that everybody who comes to San Francisco is called here and finds family, finds connection. Jason has really brought that out directorially. You don’t know sometimes that it’s there, but it’s subconsciously there, and it’s a theme that keeps popping out really nicely. The other thing is this sense from the opening number that we also keep referring back to—which I guess is what Jake was saying, as well—that this is a city of contrasts, and it’s such a muddle of different types of people.

moore: Part of the trick I think in the writing and directing is finding the unifying principle of the show. San Francisco is one thing. You are also following a lot of individual stories, with the characters all needing to find connection, for whatever reason, and that leads to the emotional themes of the play. Musically that’s something you can keep looping back through to tell the audience: We’re hearing lots of different stories tonight, and that is the unifying principle. You know, in Rent the unifying principle is that everyone lives on the Lower East Side; for any musical there’s often a unifying world. But while 28 Barbary Lane is a big part of it, the unifying principle of Tales is bigger in scope.

---

**There’s a theory . . . that we are all Atlanteans . . . Us. San Franciscans . . . In one of our last incarnations, we were all citizens of Atlantis. All of us . . . We all lived in this lovely, enlightened kingdom that sank beneath the sea a long time ago. Now we’ve come back to this special peninsula on the edge of the continent . . . because we know, in a secret corner of our minds, that we must return together to the sea.**

—Anna Madrigal, in *Tales of the City*, by Armistead Maupin
Whitty: The books are so filled with amazing coincidences, that it also gives a sort of spiritual, supernatural reason that these often incredible things happen to these characters.

Moore: That’s true. I forgot that early on I used to have that reaction—“Oh, that’s so convenient; how can they just run into each other?”

Whitty: It’s Atlantis, darling!

Moore: Part of it is that’s the way the books work, and that’s the way cities work, too. There is a sense that there’s a bigger force at work; that’s what the city is.

Garden: But that [kind of meaningful coincidence] doesn’t happen until you make the decision to leave Cleveland. You make a decision at some point in your life: I’m going to go there and do this with my life. And then of course you meet the people who all want to achieve the same things as you, and connections start happening. As they say, coincidences aren’t strange. What would be strange is if coincidences never happened.

ABOUT THE THEATRICAL ORIGINATORS OF ARMISTEAD MAUPIN’S TALES OF THE CITY: A NEW MUSICAL

Jeff Whitty

Born and raised in the small blue-collar town of Coos Bay, Oregon, Whitty has been outspokenly gay since he came out at 13. He began his theatrical life in high school as an actor and singer before studying English at the University of Oregon and acting in New York University’s M.F.A. program (earning extra cash in New York by, among other things, waiting tables and working as a go-go dancer). He credits Stephen Sondheim with changing his life at the age of 15, when he first saw Sweeney Todd: “A line of intelligence and generous wit connects his work,” writes Whitty. “Unafraid to bare his teeth, to make you laugh when you shouldn’t, and to plumb despair so deep that any feeling person can’t help but ache, Sondheim puts the lie to the stereotype of musical theater as a vessel of syrupy sentiment.” Whitty gained national prominence as author of the book for the musical Avenue Q, which won three Tony Awards (including Best Musical and Best Book) in 2004 and continued on for a six-year Broadway run, U.S. and U.K. national tours, five years in London’s West End, dozens of international productions, and its current incarnation at off Broadway’s New World Stages. With a reverence for the audience’s role as a collaborator in the creation of live theater (“Theater is born and dies at the ending point: the audience,” he has written. “All the artist needs to do is listen and ruthlessly revise”), Whitty has become known for his own ability to use disarming humor to make us look deeply at the nature of
humanity, identity, and authenticity in a conformist society. He is also the author of *The Plank Project*, a parody of documentary theater; *The Further Adventures of Hedda Gabler*, a fanciful reinvention of classic literary characters that premiered at South Coast Repertory in 2006; the romantic comedy *The Hiding Place, Balls, Suicide Weather*, and *Bring It On: The Musical*, which premiered at Atlanta’s Alliance Theatre in January 2011 and begins a New York–bound national tour in Los Angeles this fall.

**JAKE SHEARS**

Born Jason Sellards in Mesa, Arizona, Shears grew up on the San Juan Islands (near Seattle), where in high school he faced hostility after coming out at the age of 15. Inspired to pursue a life in music by a David Bowie performance witnessed when he was seven (and the support of an inspirational guitar teacher), Shears formed his first band in high school before moving to New York, where he studied fiction writing while supporting himself as a stripper and performing in New York’s underground electroclash club scene. In 2001, he and college friend Scott Hoffman (Babydaddy) formed Scissor Sisters, who have since released the albums *Scissor Sisters* (2004), *Ta-Dah* (2006), and *Night Work* (2010), which have collectively sold six million copies worldwide and won numerous honors, including three BRIT Awards, two GLAAD Media Awards, four New York Music Awards, and two Grammy nominations. Fusing melody, fun, rhythm, homage to the past, and a pro-sex message with an eclectic musical palette influenced by such groups as Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Sylvester, Elton John, Paul Williams, Kraftwerk, Duran Duran, the Bee Gees, and Queen, Shears and Scissor Sisters have become known for the unapologetic honesty and life-celebrating abandon of their music. Unabashedly supportive of the queer (as in outsider) element in society, Shears is adamant about the need to remain true to one’s inner voice. “The most important thing you can do is be honest about the life you lead,” he has said. “We [Scissor Sisters] believe there’s no such thing as an ordinary person, and we hope to create a space for people to come and express their individuality, whatever it may be. I think honesty runs through all our music. When there’s a nonjudgmental attitude towards your subject matter, there’s a joyfulness in every impulse.”
JOHN GARDEN
Born in Camberwell, South East London, and raised in a small community near Bristol, Garden discovered his love of music at the age of 11, when he first started piano lessons. Encouraged by both parents (including his father, British comic actor Graeme Garden) to pursue what he loved most, Garden quickly mastered every instrument he picked up. “It was a purely personal thing,” he has said about his decision to pursue an artistic career. “When I was in my 20s, I toyed with the idea of giving up music, but Dad and me sat down and he said: ‘It doesn’t matter what you do. We’ll be happy for you.’ I got the feeling I could have told him I was going to run off, join the circus and paint my head blue, but he would still have been proud of me.” After moving to London in 1993, Garden began his professional music career in the bars and jazz clubs of Soho, and he joined Scissor Sisters as keyboardist and musical director in 2004. Also a member of the jazz/rock trio Two Thumb, he has collaborated and/or performed with English singer-songwriter Alison Moyet, Jukes and Tamco, Elizabeth Fraser of the Cocteau Twins, Canadian singer-songwriter Jimmy Goodrich, Cornish songwriter-composer Nathan Daniel and Tilted City, Tony Orrell of jj and the Birdman, Emily Breeze, and Tristan McKay. Garden was the composer and musical director for You’ll Have Had Your Tea: The Doings of Hamish and Dougal and is currently working on an improvised score for the 1925 silent film The Lost World.

JASON MOORE
Born in Fayetteville, Arkansas, and a graduate of Northwestern University in performance studies, Moore began his Broadway career as the resident director of Les Misérables, charged with the intimidating task of cutting 15 minutes out of one of the stage’s most famous and adored blockbuster musical productions. In addition to collaborating with Jeff Whitty on Avenue Q both on and off Broadway (earning a Tony nomination for Best Director), in London, and on tour, he has directed Broadway productions of Steel Magnolias and Shrek: The Musical (Outer Critics Circle and Drama Desk Award nominations; also in London and on tour), as well as Jerry Springer: The Opera at Carnegie Hall; off-Broadway productions of Speech and Debate, Guardians, and The Crumple Zone; and episodes of the television series Dawson’s Creek, One Tree Hill, Everwood, and Brothers & Sisters. Moore has said that he sees the role of the director of a new piece of theater as that of peacemaker and facilitator of ideas, and he revels in the intimacy of collaboration. About the difference between developing a musical and a play, he has said: “[Musicals] take a lot longer. There are a lot more collaborators. There’s a lot more experimentation. It is a longer, more arduous emotional journey. It can also, therefore, be more rewarding. As with anything, the more you give to it, the more it gives back.”
Making a new musical is truly one of the most difficult things. People don’t really understand until they’ve been through it, or you’ve witnessed other shows or know people who’ve been through it. It’s a really tricky proposition, because new musicals require so many people to come together to tell the same story. Fortunately, we have a beautiful set of stories to work with.

Coming to A.C.T. [for *Tales of the City*] was sort of a no-brainer in some senses—to be able to come to San Francisco to this beautiful theater, to this grand physical space, in order to tell these stories. But we also talked about how the process of evolving a musical is delicate, and we wanted a home where we felt safe taking risks and making choices with these characters that haven’t been made before—they’re going to sing, for one. To have a safe home to do the work without the burden of, what happens after this first run? or [the burdens of commercial producing in] New York is crucial for our creative process. So I want to thank A.C.T. and everybody here who has helped us get to this day, because it’s no small feat.

The books are sprawling, and the stories [told in the musical] cover most of book one [*Tales of the City*] and part of book two [*More Tales of the City*]. So there are 55 characters, 32 locations, and 120 set changes. It’s a big, sprawling show. But it has a beautiful warm heart at its center.

The more time I spend in San Francisco and the more time I get to know it, both going through the books and in person, [the more I realize] how important creating this world is—this mysterious world of *Tales of the City* and of San Francisco. We’re blessed to be in
this city. Creating the world of *Tales* on paper and on the piano has been a big part of the challenge. But also, how in this incarnation do we physicalize this world? San Francisco (I don’t have to tell you because most of you live here) is such a special place to try to figure out. How do you to capture the fog? The bay? The hills? I was standing on top of a hill recently, walking down (I’ve been trying to take different routes home every day, to see what the different views are), and I remarked how every corner gives you a different perspective. It’s disorienting, it’s confusing, and it’s mysterious, sometimes.

So the logistics of telling this story have been a big question, but also, how do we evoke the essences of San Francisco? Certainly hills, perspective, change, transformation. These are stories about transformation—people who made transformations in the past; people who are making transformations themselves during the period of the story. Also, one of the mysterious things about the books, and the truth of all these characters, is that they each carry a secret. Who you see on the outside is not necessarily what is the truth on the inside. How do we get that sense of magic and transformation?

One of the other particular things that [the picture that inspired the set design for this production; see page 21] evoked for me when I saw it for the first time is the sense that out of any window any story could emerge. There are a thousand stories that could be told. The evocation of many things happening simultaneously is important for *Tales of the City*, where all these voices participate in a chorus of the city. It is crucial to how we’re going to tell the story onstage. If we took the time to tell these stories one at a time, [the play] would be nine hours long. So how do we tell these stories simultaneously and in layers? That’s one of the things that musicals, in particular, can do: you can have two people sing a song while they’re not in the same location, but they link together. That’s one of the things that musicals can do that many other forms can’t.

FROM THE MEET & GREET

**AUTHOR ARMISTEAD MAUPIN**
I’m honored to be here and I’ve never felt happier. This is one of the happiest days of my life.

**DIRECTOR JASON MOORE**
Thank you, Armistead. It’s really thrilling to hear you say that. The books you’ve written, the world you’ve created, have meant so much to everybody in this room. Some people here lived through those experiences, have known that world, and your stories helped them in their lives. Some of us are probably discovering it for the first time as we begin here. That’s one of my main reasons for being here. I’m thrilled to be here in the city that gave birth to *Tales of the City*. 
Douglas W. Schmidt has designed more than 200 productions over the past 40 years, including recent A.C.T. shows *Travesties* (2006), *Rock 'n' Roll* (2008), and *The Tosca Project* (2010). He has worked on and off Broadway, in London’s West End, and at The Metropolitan Opera. His Broadway experience includes designing the original production of *Grease* (1972), which at one point was Broadway’s longest-running show, and *Frankenstein* (1980), a legendary multimillion-dollar spectacle that closed on opening night. He is also a Drama Desk Award winner and a Tony nominee. Despite his vast experience, when asked if he has developed any theories or principles that guide his work from show to show, Schmidt demurs. In fact, he insists, experience has taught him just the opposite:

I simply respond to the project at hand. It is what it is. A play will dictate what it wants to be, so I try to remain as open and as flexible as possible. The big thing is not to impose a particular visual style on something just because you know how to do it. I would much rather struggle to find something that works for the play.

A native of Cincinnati, Schmidt moved from New York City to a duplex on San Francisco’s Russian Hill in 1978. He was quite taken by his new surroundings. “My first and lasting impression of San Francisco,” he relates, “was that it was a white city, a city full of light. Having lived for years in the grey canyons of New York, I was blown away by the sparkle of the sun on the city and the bay.” He credits this sensation to the city’s countless vistas, as well as to the characteristic pastel palette of its houses. When A.C.T. asked him to design *Tales of the City*, Schmidt says, he knew intuitively that his set had to reflect the brightness, the “freshness,” that had so captivated him when he first arrived.

Schmidt describes the main feature of his design for *Tales* as a “three-story scaffold-like structure.” We spoke with him a month before the show’s first preview, as Schmidt was leading A.C.T.’s scene shop through the construction of this massive set piece. Due to the structure’s scale, the crew had to build it piece by piece in the shop and transport the segments to the American Conservatory Theater by truck as they were completed. Only after all the pieces arrived at Geary Street could the whole unit be assembled. At that point, Schmidt says, “You have to hope you made the right decisions, because you never really saw part A with part B.”
Back Stairs, Russian Hill, San Francisco. Photo by Dave Glass. This image inspired the scenic design for Tales of the City.
The finished structure will be as big as a house, and the building’s design is informed by the distinctive architecture of Russian Hill residences. But the *Tales of the City* set will not simply be a stand-in for 28 Barbary Lane (the address of Mrs. Madrigal’s fictional lodgings). As lighting, props, and additional scenic elements transform the structure over the course of the show, says Schmidt, “it will come to represent the environment of San Francisco.”

**WHAT INSPIRED YOUR DESIGN FOR *TALES OF THE CITY***?

The structure uses the vernacular of San Francisco’s back stairs. When Jason [Moore], our director, came out for one of the initial meetings, we did our own walking tour of the city. We walked Telegraph Hill and Russian Hill; we walked out to Land’s End [San Francisco’s rocky northwest cliff]. We saw a good variety of the places that appear in the books and in the play. We both responded to the hidden alleyways and the magical steps that have all those wonderful little digressions. This provoked the idea of designing a unit that could handle all the interior scenes of the play, but that would also give a sense of the hills, the up-and-down obstacle course that is San Francisco.

**AT THE FIRST REHEARSAL, YOU TOLD US THAT SAN FRANCISCO IS A “DESIGNER’S TRAP” BECAUSE OF ITS STRIKING ARCHITECTURE.**

It’s the architecture, but it’s also the environment and the natural configuration of the Bay Area. It’s very dramatic. You can’t turn a corner without having a beautiful vista open up in front of you. When I first came here, I was surprised that San Francisco is laid out on a grid pattern, which is very atypical for a hill town. You never see that. Everywhere else the streets wind around the hills.
When you look at a map of downtown San Francisco, you can’t see where the hills are. “No hills there!” [Laughs] It’s really remarkable. When you go to a town like Los Angeles and you drive the Hollywood Hills, you can drive those hills forever and never see the city because you’ve got rows of houses always blocking the view. There’s never a straight shot. You’re always winding around the canyons and the hilltops.

But you can’t escape the beauty of San Francisco. As a designer, it really infects you. You keep saying, “Oh, that’s a great detail” or “Oh, that vista, we’ve got to have that.” By the time you’re done with that, you’ve got a whole picture-postcard collection that you’re trying to put onstage. Very early on, we decided that we didn’t want to go that route. Tales of the City is much more of an interior story. It’s character driven. While this environment is magical and affects everybody, in some ways it’s incidental to the story. We do have one image that stands in for a lot of the views of the city—we have a night backdrop that shows the Bay Bridge and the Transamerica Pyramid. But overall, I’m trying to inform us about the city’s topography implicitly rather than by putting a lot onstage.

Do you have a favorite view of San Francisco?

I lived on Russian Hill for 13 years, on a little street called Aladdin Terrace, so I’m very partial to that view. When my partner and I were trying to find an apartment, we looked and looked and looked. This was in 1978. We really weren’t finding anything. And then some real estate woman called up and said that a couple in North Beach just had a duplex come available. “It’s pretty funky,” she said, “but you might want to go take a look at it.” So we did, and it was one of those moments when you walk in the door and say, “This is it, I’ll take it.” Before we’d even seen the place. We had just walked into the little courtyard that was hidden in the back, with trees and all sorts of tropical foliage. It was exactly how Armistead Maupin describes Barbary Lane. We looked at each other and said, “I have a very good feeling about this.” That place had spectacular views of the city out one side and the bay out the other. As close as you can get to 360 degrees without being on top of the Transamerica Pyramid.

Russian Hill is fantastical, somehow. When you look up at it from below, it all seems architecturally impossible. It reminds me of a Middle Eastern hill city with mud buildings piled one on top of the other. Ours was wood, but it’s exactly the same kind of feeling.
TWENTY-EIGHT BARBARY LANE HAS BECOME A LEGENDARY PLACE. DOES THIS ADD TO THE DESIGNER’S RESPONSIBILITY?

You try to be true to the source as much as you can. For the stage, you always try to find the essential elements. That’s true whether you’re thinking about a physical location or a character’s motivation. You try to make it as concise as possible. That’s the challenge.

YOU LOOK FOR THE ESSENTIAL DETAILS.

Yes. In this design, we often work with small details. We have a huge pile of props that we have to get on and off stage, but for any given scene? It’s a lamp, it’s a couch. Everything you put on the stage really needs to count. It needs to be as specific as you can make it. So the details that we use within the structure relate to the characters that inhabit its spaces. DeDe and Beauchamp’s apartment has a high-end, elegant, slightly pretentious look. Mrs. Madrigal’s house is the exact opposite of that: it’s eclectic and exotic and bohemian and not dyed-to-match at all. It’s a chaotic space. There’s this forest of greenery that comes in and surrounds the action there.

THE SET NEEDS TO BE VERY FLEXIBLE.

The script couldn’t be more peripatetic, so we have to be able to change very rapidly from one location to another. There are 32 locations and around 50 scenes, so you can’t really stop for anything. The structure itself doesn’t change much, but there are lots of smaller elements that come in and interact with it. It would be death to the play if you had to wait for the scenery to get into place, so hopefully we can make it very fluid, with scenes overlapping in an almost cinematic way. But the centerpiece of the play is the building at
Barbary Lane, with its different apartments, its different routes to get from point A to point B. All of that had to be solved in the design somehow.

**DO THE RAPID TRANSITIONS PRESENT A LOGISTICAL CHALLENGE?**

Yes, they do. For us, in a show of this complexity, the most challenging part of the design is working out everything that needs to happen backstage. Much of that job falls to the stage-management team. Fortunately, there’s a lot of flexibility here at A.C.T. because the stagehands can all do multiple jobs. They’re going to be very busy. And then you add 25 or so actors, three-quarters of whom will be backstage changing clothes at any given time. So you have Filene’s Basement backstage, and people trying to move furniture in and out of the show. The technical [rehearsal] period will be very intense. Quite late nights, I expect.

But I’m very impressed by everyone’s commitment. It’s been—and will continue to be—quite a bear. But you always feel confident when the producing organization is willing to do whatever they can do, within reason, to realize the project fully. And my crew, the scene shop, the paint shop—they’ve all just been terrific.

**WERE ANY OF THE PLAY’S LOCATIONS PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TO DESIGN?**

The hardest one was Winnemucca. All of a sudden you’re out of the play’s friendly physical environment. You have to somehow say, “Time out, going to Nevada!” The audience has looked at this structure all night long and associated it with San Francisco. What changes can we work on it to make it suddenly be Nevada? We have a couple of tricks. Just yesterday, I was looking at websites with images of Winnemucca. It couldn’t be more featureless. It’s absolutely flat, with some little mountains and miles of sage brush. It’s just hopeless to try to find anything visually iconic, anything that says “Aha! Northern Nevada.” But I saw that an awful lot of the pictures were shot in winter, which frankly never even occurred to me. Nevada, it’s hot. But it gets really cold in Winnemucca and a lot of the pictures that I pulled up had snow on the ground and people walking around in cowboy hats and shearling coats. In the context of the play, the Winnemucca scenes happen somewhere between Thanksgiving and Christmas—very likely there would be snow, or at least it would be bitterly cold. I realized that this rugged place might contrast nicely with what we’ve seen in San Francisco, where it’s kind of spring all the time. So I sent a memo around asking if we can capitalize on this, either in wardrobe or somehow else. Can we make this other place something really other than San Francisco? I think that it could be more telling than all the scenery we could try if someone just comes in the door and, you know, takes off a parka.
there’s one last thing I need to raise, given the period of this show. In the late ’70s, a mirror that you designed for an adaptation of Alice in Wonderland was purchased by Studio 54 in New York.

Oh my god. Indeed. It was a musical called Alice that was produced by Mike Nichols and his partner, Lewis Allen. They had produced Annie. It had an all-black cast and took place in a disco. Alice was played by Debbie Allen in her most ravishing and beautiful youth. She goes to a disco called the Rabbit Hole, ingests some fashionable drug, and is catapulted into this phantasmagorical world that was meant to evoke Alice in Wonderland but also be a comment on society at the time it was written.

The show was fraught. At one point, I think, the director locked herself in her hotel room for a week. But the design was ambitious. There were actually two big full-stage mirrors, one upstage and one downstage. The downstage one was made out of two-way glass so you could see through it from the audience. Inside those two mirrors, the effect is like sitting in the barber’s chair with the mirror in front of you and the mirror behind you—you just look into this infinity of reflections. In fact, it’s called an infinity box. That was the set for the disco and for most of the musical numbers. It worked great, I thought. It was quite a stunning look.

But then we closed out of town in Philadelphia, and we had these huge mirrors. They were 40 feet wide and 30 feet tall. What to do with them? Where could they go? Then somebody just called up out of nowhere and said, “Oh, we’ll take the mirrors.” Nobody even knew who it was until they showed up at Studio 54.

DID YOU EVER GO TO THE CLUB TO SEE THEM?
I did, I went to Studio 54. Actually, I don’t think I remembered that they were going to be there. Then there they were. It was like déjà vu all over again, and not necessarily in a good way.

WHAT’S IT LIKE TO REVISIT THAT PERIOD NOW?
Well, the environment is different in Tales of the City. Maybe with the exception of The EndUp—that falls into the Alice world a bit. But San Francisco really is its own world. It’s isolated, unique. When I first moved here in the late ’70s, I was still very busy pursuing my career in New York. I was traveling a lot. But I did see the important events and shows, the latest whatever, and it was quite special. Everything that has been said about the street life of the demimonde of that era is true and then some. It was a very exciting and provocative time in San Francisco.
Beaver Bauer has always made a powerful first impression. Tales of the City scenic designer Douglas Schmidt first met Bauer in 1980, not long after he moved to San Francisco from New York. He recalls:

It was at an opening night party for an Angels of Light show at Theatre Artaud. The show was called Holy Cow. It was based on a Hindu myth, but I can't quite remember what it was about since we were all well lubricated at the time. But I remember Beaver. She was mysteriously garbed as a nun, veiled and all in white, carrying an armful of lilies. She was somehow above the fray. I'd spent my career to that point in New York, where I’d seen great work and fabulous costumes. But this was just amazing.

Bauer is now a familiar face at a.c.t.; she has designed costumes for Scapin (2010), War Music (2009), The Government Inspector (2008), The Imaginary Invalid (2007), The Gamester (2005), and A Christmas Carol (2005–10)—to name only her most recent credits. The resident costume designer for Teatro ZinZanni, she has also worked at most of the major theaters in the Bay Area. But her life’s work on the San Francisco theater scene stretches back four decades to her years working with the performance troupe Angels of Light, a formative—indeed transformative—time for the adventurous artist. Like Tales of the City’s Mary Ann Singleton, Bauer grew up in Cleveland, Ohio. In 1971, at the age of 22, she hitchhiked to San Francisco to create a new life for herself. Bauer remembers:

I came here with no knowledge of what I was going to do or where I was going to stay. Not to exaggerate, but I probably had 25 cents in my pocket. I had this firm belief that I would find people and live with them, and I did. I met some staggeringly fantastic people.

In particular, Bauer was befriended by Hibiscus, who founded San Francisco’s notorious psychedelic drag queen troupe The Cockettes in the late 1960s. “He was the sun,” Bauer recalls. “He was one of those people who are powerful enough to pull you into their orbit.” When she first encountered him, Hibiscus had recently started Angels of Light, which was dedicated to creating free theatrical performances and cabaret events. Although she had never been involved in theater, Bauer soon found herself onstage: “Hibiscus was the
kind of person who would just say, ‘Do you want to be in my show?’ And I said, ‘Yeah!’ That’s really how it happened.”

The Angels were known for their extravagant and imaginative costuming, in performance and on the street. Bauer recalls:

Hibiscus was someone I saw walking down the street awash in veils, with white feathers coming off his head, and sometimes he’d have calla lilies. Within a certain subculture, you’d sometimes spend the whole day getting dressed just to go out to the grocery store. That was absolutely true. And you wouldn’t necessarily be the same person each day you went to the grocery store.

Her new social circle—unlike anything she had left behind in Cleveland—had a powerful effect on Bauer. “Hibiscus transformed me,” she says. “He told me that I could be what I wanted to be: ‘Just get your costume together.’”

Troupe members began living together as a commune, crowding at first into a flat in the Haight. A special room was set aside in which the Angels designed and created their own spectacular costumes. “Everybody would have to ‘get their drag together,’” Bauer remembers. “That’s how we talked about it.” The communal costume work eventually took over the entire apartment. “One day we decided to make the kitchen bigger,” says Bauer, “so we just knocked down a wall by ourselves with hammers and whatever else we had . . . we were very reckless at times.”

Even in the free-thinking environs of the Haight, the resplendent Angels were not entirely welcome.

Somehow we got attacked by these glue-sniffers who lived across the street. I guess they didn’t like all these glittery people coming and going at all hours. They came in and trashed the place. The fire department had to come—the place was going to explode somehow, there was a leaking gas main. So we got kicked out.
The troupe moved to a house on Oak Street, which “became Grand Central Station.” Angels of Light was part of the underground “free” subculture that was then proliferating in the neighborhood. “There were all sorts of communes at the time,” Bauer recalls, “and we were the theater commune.” This informal network was “based around the ideal of ‘free’—of sharing, of finding ways to make the world different. Summed up that way, maybe it doesn’t sound very sophisticated. But these were very committed, passionate people with strong beliefs.”

Resources were understandably scarce. “We’d get materials wherever we could,” says Bauer. Angels would trade, borrow, and dumpster-dive to find the raw materials needed for their drag. “You’d take Christmas ornaments and make yourself a headdress.”

Like their laborious costuming, the group’s performances were created communally over the course of a lengthy creative process. “There was never really any one mind in control of the production,” Bauer recalls. “It was a true collaboration.” The rehearsal atmosphere was often boisterous:

We’d take a lot of time on our performances, working on them for at least a couple of months. We’d all be rehearsing late at night in one of our apartments and someone would say, “Let’s go downstairs for last call.” And we would, and then we’d come back and keep working.

The performances that arose out of these lively collaborations were often outlandish. “One year, on Easter, [the Angels] all dressed up as the Virgin Mary and Joseph. Then we tied Hibiscus on a cross and tossed him off Land’s End, just as a little bit of theater.” But such extraordinary happenings were part and parcel of an extraordinary time in San Francisco.

We had just made it through the ’60s and the Vietnam War had ended. We had all been raised in a certain way to be a certain person. Most of us who left
[home] didn’t want to become the people we were supposed to become. But in San Francisco, there was this wonderful atmosphere of self-expression. It was very riotous and very transformative. People came here to reinvent themselves—I know I did. We didn’t always know where to go, or how to do it, or whether it would be okay. But we came here and made ourselves who we wanted to be. And we made a family for ourselves. That’s what’s so resonant about Tales of the City for me. It’s such a mirror of those times.

The city’s transformative power gave Bauer the gift of a lifelong career. “Here I found a home in which I could become an artist. I don’t think it would have happened for me in Cleveland, Ohio. This was a magical place. It saved my life.”

With this profound personal connection to the ground-breaking performance culture of 1970s San Francisco, Bauer was the natural choice to create costumes for the theatrical world of Tales of the City. Thirty years after Schmidt met Bauer at that Angels of Lights afterparty, Tales director Jason Moore also had a memorable first encounter with the designer. Speaking to the cast at the first rehearsal, he remembered, “When I met Beaver for the first time, the research she brought wasn’t anything from the internet. It wasn’t anything from the library. It was from her closet. That’s when I knew we had the right person for this production. She’s become one of our spiritual guides.”

The historical period may come naturally to Bauer, but Tales is still quite a challenge. First and foremost, there’s the issue of scale. Bauer has created sketches for more than 200 distinct looks for the play’s 50-plus characters. Each look needs to be assembled from many coordinated costume pieces—all the way down to the proper shoes for each scene. Bauer and her crew have been scouring the city’s vintage-clothing shops on a daily basis, since each piece they can find on the rack is one less they have to build from scratch. Some items are harder than others to track down. Sweaters and outerwear are plentiful, but few pairs of flared disco pants seem to have survived—despite the fact that they were typically made from space-age polyester.

And the costume team can’t just grab anything that catches their eyes. Clothing within a stage world has to be instantly communicative. “Our choices always need to help define
the characters,” says Bauer. This is all the more important in a large musical like *Tales*, in which many members of the ensemble play multiple roles. “There are a lot of quick-changes,” Bauer says, “so when an actor comes out as someone new, the audience has to know who they are right away.” For the principal characters, whom the audience follows throughout the performance, the challenge is slightly different: “When characters return in later scenes, we need to remember who they are, even if they’re in a different look.” Bauer has therefore tried to create a coherent “wardrobe” for each of the main characters. She means this quite literally; for example, “when Mouse shows up at [Mona’s] door with just a single suitcase, those are all the clothes he has in the world.”

The content of his or her wardrobe reveals a character’s social circle to the audience. This is crucial to the dramaturgy of the musical, as Maupin’s writing presents a wide-angle view of ’70s San Francisco. The play’s group scenes take place within different subcultures. Most importantly, the story’s drama is generated in large part by the collision between the distinct milieus of 28 Barbary Lane and the Halcyon ad agency. To dramatize these separate worlds, Bauer draws upon the range of choices possible within the astonishing vernacular of ’70s fashion. Variation in the use of patterning, she says, has become particularly meaningful in her design:

The ’70s had more patterning than maybe any time in history, at all levels of society. When we go out shopping, the number of available patterns is stupefying, and many of them are just unbelievably bold. You’re in the shop and you think, “People actually wore that?” This is true even for office [attire], not just the festive clothing. But within that, for the Halcyons, we’re aiming for less-outrageous patterns and a more rigid color palette.

DeDe Halcyon Day’s clothes, for example, will match; Bauer describes her outfits as “very tailored and coordinated.” The fashion choices at 28 Barbary Lane are more eclectic: “Mona wears more of an assemblage,” Bauer says. “When she gets dressed in the morning, she puts a lot of fun and expression into her outfits, and she’s very aware of the outside personality she’s creating.” At the same time, Bauer sees “a dichotomy” in Mona’s clothing.
She has to adjust her fashion sense if she has any hope of negotiating the more conservative environment of the Halcyon office. Mary Ann also needs to travel between these two worlds:

Mary Ann finds herself within that Halcyon world at the beginning of the play. We want to show the change in her clothing from when she first arrives and applies to work there, to later on when she’s been incorporated into the society of Barbary Lane. She goes through a transformation, so we need to tell the story of that.

With all these variables in play, fittings at a.c.t.’s costume shop have become collaborative events. “I need to be very flexible,” says Bauer, “because in the fitting room, we’re balancing all these different pieces of information.” She has her sketches to guide her, but so much depends on the authentic elements her team has been able to find and, within those options, which wardrobe choice makes the clearest statement about the character in any given moment. Bauer might, say, have several t-shirts picked out for Mouse, but she doesn’t come into the fitting room with a rigid plan for which shirt he should wear in which scene. Rather, to help make such decisions, the costume team depends on feedback from the actors, who bring their ideas from the ongoing work in the rehearsal room. This makes the process more chaotic, and Bauer admits that “not everybody else would work that way,” but she finds that the flux spurs creative decisions and helps the team find ways to “tell the story of transition and transformation” in a more genuine way.
Asked if working collaboratively in the eclectic Angels of Light costume room informed this approach, Bauer responds, “Absolutely.”

Bauer says that the cast has taken quickly to this collaborative aspect of their costume fittings, which lets them be more involved in decisions being made about their characters. “And it’s a really fun period for them,” Bauer says with a laugh. “Often one actor will be leaving a fitting and they’ll say to the next one—they’ll pull something off the rack and hold it up and say, ‘I get to wear this!’”

When asked about revisiting this period of history herself, Bauer is introspective. Since work on the show began, she says, she has been having dreams about old friends whom she had not remembered for years. While her busy schedule of fittings and purchasing does not allow her to attend many rehearsals, she tries to go whenever she can; it is crucial, she says, for a designer to stay viscerally connected to the flow of the creative process. Two days before we spoke to her, a scheduling quirk known as the “daylight day of rest” had shifted rehearsals to late evening, well after the city’s vintage shops had closed and closer to the old last-call hour of Angels of Light rehearsals. Appropriately, when Bauer arrived the cast was staging one of the most raucous sequences of the play:

They were doing the dance scene in The EndUp. It was like there were ghosts in the room and the ghosts were my friends. To see that same attitude—I don’t want to call it “carefree” because we took what we believed in very seriously. It was our lives. But to see that sense of fun and riotousness in the room . . . I see myself and my friends there. It’s like a snapshot. Someone came up and asked me, “Are you having a flashback?” And I said, “No, actually, not a flashback.” You know what I mean? It’s just . . . memories.

But this play really does give us a snapshot of a moment in time. The characters don’t know what’s going to happen to them. They don’t know about AIDS and everything else we know. The city’s changed so much. Where would they be now? What would they be doing at 62? A lot of them, to be frank, would probably be dead.

So the question is, how do we make this not just a . . . nostalgia piece. Not just an innocent snapshot. That’s a question that I think everyone—the whole creative team—has asked. And the answer is to tell the story of these characters in an honest and meaningful way.
Three years after settling in San Francisco, Armistead Maupin was named one of the city’s Ten Sexiest Men by San Francisco magazine. He doesn’t remember who suggested him for the list but is impressed to this day that in 1974 the magazine sought out someone who was openly gay. But not too openly gay. The piece describes the former naval officer as having “little in common with gay political and sexual activists. ‘Who wants to make a career out of being oppressed?’ he grins. ‘Life’s too damn short.’”

Cut to 2011. Maupin, who has sold millions of books, considers himself an activist first and a writer second. Through his work—the eight Tales of the City novels as well as Maybe the Moon and The Night Listener—thousands of gay men and lesbians have learned that, as he says, “a happy life can exist,” which was news for many of them when the stories began appearing in 1974. “I met a Samoan man in Sydney recently,” Maupin recalls, “who told me that the books had saved his life when he was 15 years old. It’s the single thing I hear most often and it never fails to make me feel good. I care most about the ways in which I’ve been able to change the lives of other people. That’s the best use I can make of myself.”

A trip to Australia this spring reminded him, however, that progress isn’t made uniformly everywhere. Maupin and his husband, Christopher Turner, were in a bar in Alice Springs when Turner asked where the rest room was. A bartender told him there wasn’t one, and that he’d have to use a public toilet across the street. Maupin, who’d used the facility the day before, pointed to it and asked, “What’s that over there?” The bartender said, “That’s reserved for real men.”

“Neither of us could quite believe he said it,” Maupin said when he described the incident to an Australian radio interviewer. He wrote about it on his Facebook page and reported it to the local tourist information booth. “We could have just walked away from
that and said, all right, he’s an asshole and we’re no worse for wear, and forget about it,” Maupin says. “But I realized that if I said something, it could make a difference for other people.”

Apologies flowed, from the bar owner and the tourist board and Australians across the country. “The response was one of huge embarrassment on the part of the country, on the part of Alice Springs. They were shocked that someone had done something so inhospitable. People felt they needed to be answerable for homophobia. We have to be braced at any moment of the day for that kind of malicious behavior. It’s just built into our systems because we’ve known about it for so long.”

The young man who arrived in San Francisco in 1971 with all of his belongings stuffed into an Opel gt—“a ridiculous little car which you practically have to lie on your back to drive”—was even further from an activist than the man whose likeness, in plaid shirt, jeans, and workboots, striding confidently down the sidewalk, ran in San Francisco magazine. The scion of a prominent Raleigh, North Carolina, family, son of a lawyer and great-great-grandson of a Confederate general, Armistead Maupin, Jr., had amassed all the credentials of a solid southern traditionalist. At the University of North Carolina he wrote a conservative political column. After a year of law school—“I was living on visions of Perry Mason; I didn’t really have a sense of how dry and dreadful it was going to be”—he took a job as an interviewer at a Raleigh television station, where his boss was future Senator Jesse Helms. Then came Vietnam, where he served first as an aide to Admiral Elmo Zumwalt and later on the River Patrol. Aboard the final naval vessel to exit Cambodia in 1970, Maupin placed himself furthest astern, and, clinging for dear life to the anchor winch, he became the last American sailor to leave the country. (He was also naked, but that’s another story.)

He later returned to Southeast Asia, part of a contingent of veterans who erected housing for their Vietnamese counterparts. They did less building than interviews with American journalists, and Maupin eventually realized that it was a propaganda project, run from the office of Nixon aide Charles Colson.

In short, there was little to suggest that Maupin would fit into a wide-open city of young people feverishly exploring their identity and sexuality. He knew he was gay, but he guarded the secret closely. “Back in Charleston, when someone told me that there were 50 gay bars in San Francisco, I righteously declared that I would never go into one of those.”

He went into one his first night in the city. “It was called The Rendezvous, on Sutter Street downtown. You went up some narrow, dark stairs into a room full of men who were slow-dancing to Streisand.” The memory raises a laugh. “There was a little man in a dj booth there for a mock radio station called kyky. And I didn’t get the joke. In those days I was Mary Ann in every sense of the word.”
But not for long. Like many gay men of his generation, once out, Maupin made up for lost time. As his inhibitions were steamed away in San Francisco’s bathhouses, so were other inherited attitudes. While the tyranny of physical beauty was part of the gay sexual ethos, equality in matters of race and class was fundamental in the bathhouses and bars. As an out gay man, Maupin also came to understand that the prejudice aimed at him was no different in its roots or intention than that directed at other minorities.

While discovering sex and egalitarianism at night, Maupin juggled writing and survival during the day. After a series of nine-to-five jobs, including answering phones at a church hotline and working at a couple of ad agencies, Maupin affirmed another new identity, as a full-time writer. He had cards printed reading, “Armistead Maupin writes for a living.” The message was as much for himself as for anyone who might need his services. “I had bounced back and forth about the notion of a day job and writing after work, and I always sympathize with people who do that because it was never possible for me. By the time I got home I was ready to veg out and watch TV.

So I figured if I quit my day job it would force me to work harder as a freelancer.” The risk paid off. In the summer of 1974, he began a column for the new San Francisco edition of the Marin Pacific Sun based on his diurnal and nocturnal adventures. The first installment found a single young woman named Mary Ann joining her friend Connie at the Marina Safeway—the “Social Safeway,” named for its army of singles looking for hookups. The San Francisco Pacific Sun folded after five weeks. In 1976, the San Francisco Chronicle hired Maupin to revive the column, hoping to attract a younger readership.

He transformed his life into fiction on an almost daily basis. Producing five columns a week, Maupin wrote in public without a net, with no chance to revise a story line or erase a character: a nerve-wracking assignment, but one with advantages for a young writer. “My life was changing, and here was the city that was making it happen, and I was getting to write about it. Not to mention, I was so excited to have a full-time job. They paid me a reporter’s salary. Writers of fiction just don’t get that.” They also don’t get inundated with ideas for characters and plots from friends and readers. “I was constantly being told amazing stories that I folded immediately into the plotline. It didn’t hurt that I was going out every night and having adventures of my own. It didn’t hurt that I sat next to Pat Steger, the Chronicle’s soci-
ety editor. When I heard about a society kleptomaniac who had left a local hostess’s home only to have a Fabergé egg fall out of her panty hose, I used it—and struck fear in the hearts of a lot of those ladies in the social columns because I was somewhere very close to the truth.”

Meanwhile, his attitude toward activism was changing. In 1977, an Associated Press item caught his eye: the singer Anita Bryant was calling for a repeal of a Miami law that forbade discrimination against gays and lesbians. Almost immediately, Maupin wrote it into the column. He had already come to believe that every gay person should be out. Now he understood that with visibility came responsibility. “Once you’re visible and the arrows start pointing your way, then you have to be an activist. You have to do it not so much for yourself but for other people who are getting even worse treatment because they aren’t visible. I was already an activist in the sense that I was humanizing gay characters in that first year of Tales, but it wasn’t until Anita Bryant announced her Save Our Children campaign that I realized that I was going to have to get serious.” His editors at the Chronicle were dubious. “They said, ‘Are you sure you want to do this? What does anybody in California care about what’s happening in South Florida?’” In response, Maupin wrote the letter that Michael Tolliver sends to his mother after he learns she’s joined Save Our Children.

When Miami voted to repeal the law, Maupin heard talk among some friends that it would be wise to become less visible. He responded with a column in which Michael declared that when he came out of the closet he’d nailed the door shut behind him. Alerted by a colleague in the People department that the editors thought the letter would offend readers, Maupin called Richard Thieriot, the Chronicle’s publisher and editor. “I told him to find another writer if they killed it.” A long wait ensued while Maupin wondered if he’d talked himself out of a job by standing on principle. “Two hours later Thieriot called back and said, ‘Okay, we’ll run it.’ I went to the wall with them. I did that time and time again over some things are almost impossible to comprehend today. I wrote a passage in which DeDe simply reflects on the beauty of her girlfriend’s face, and they said that would be too much for their readers. The phrase they always used was, they didn’t want to offend ‘the people in the Sunset.’ This was a perfectly preposterous notion because plenty of the fan mail was coming from people in the Sunset. The Chronicle was generally okay with the story, but it was clear that if it contained a political message, it better not upset people.”

For Maupin, his journey has been the message, and neither is for gays and lesbians alone. “Authenticity’s the word. There’s a moment in everybody’s life when they have to claim it and that’s the reason I’ve seen straight folks weeping over Michael’s letter. Not because they have anyone gay in their life, necessarily, or relate to that aspect of it, but because they know what it’s like to put something on the line to their parents and hope that they’ll love them just the same.”
When he was about 17, Maupin walked into a newsstand in downtown Raleigh and for the first time in his life saw a piece of homoerotica. “It was a magazine called *Demi-Gods*, and there was a blond, young hunk on the cover sitting up in bed with the satin sheets pulled up to his waist, and he clearly wasn’t there for the purpose of espousing health or fitness. He was there solely to seduce me. I left in a panic, because I knew that I’d crossed some kind of line. I went back to my car and sat there in the blazing summer heat in this little red Volkswagen and thought, ‘You’ve officially gone to hell and there’s no turning back now.’ It’s funny, I could have bought the magazine because the place was run by a blind man. But I was certain he could tell that I was looking at the cover of that magazine.

“Now it’s hanging on the wall of my kitchen, and it represents that journey to me. I used to look at a page of text and see the word *homosexual*, and it would leap out at me like an accusation. I live a wonderful life now, and none of the things I feared came true. It’s been a long way to travel—and I understand why other people have to make that journey, too.”

**ARMISTEAD MAUPIN ON . . .**

**THE THEATER**

Maupin made his theatrical debut when his mother auditioned for the title role in *Medea* at the Raleigh Little Theater. She wasn’t cast, but he appeared as one of the queen’s dead sons. “I accomplished this by lying very still over my best friend under a blood-soaked rag and trying not to giggle.” Theater had gotten into his system. He next appeared as the kidnapped son in *The Desperate Hours*. “It required me to walk around with a baseball glove saying butch things, which was something of a challenge.”

In 1975, he adapted the libretto of Offenbach’s *La Périchole*, staged at the Curran Theater. “That was a kind of Ruby Keeler moment for me: Michael Feingold, who was supposed to translate, had something that took him out of the game at the last minute and I was asked to fill in because I was the publicity writer at the opera. I used to write parodies of librettos, little mock versions featuring staff members at the opera and for special occasions, like birthdays, going-away parties, that sort of thing.”

Although a longtime A.C.T. subscriber now, Maupin didn’t go to the theater much in his early days in San Francisco: “Frankly, I was more concerned with sowing my wild oats at night and writing during the day.”
EARLY VISITS TO SAN FRANCISCO
Maupin saw San Francisco for the first time in 1970. “On the way to Vietnam I stayed at the Powell Hotel at the foot of Market Street on the recommendation of the USO. I took a Grey Line tour and was completely captivated when we got to the top of Russian Hill and I saw those white buildings against the blue of the sky. The tour also took me to Mission Dolores, where I had a huge flash of revelation. I turned to the woman next to me on the tour and said, ‘This is where Carlotta Valdez is buried!’ She had no idea what I was referring to, but I was one happy sailor.”

His return visit included a couple of eye- and ear-opening moments. “When I came back to San Francisco and was processing out of the Navy, my friend Jay Hanan and his wife, Peggy Knickerbocker, were my hosts for a few days. They invited me to a wedding that was happening out at Sea Cliff in a house that later belonged to Robin Williams. I remember going to that party in a tuxedo that I had borrowed from Peggy’s father, Payne Knickerbocker, the former drama critic at the Chronicle, and being embraced by a lot of strangers, male and female, solely on the basis that I had returned home in one piece from Vietnam. Men didn’t hug each other back in North Carolina, so to feel that sort of all-embracing tenderness was quite eye-opening. Later, Peggy drove me around North Beach, and pointed out various sites, including the Palace Theater, where, she explained, The Cockettes performed. I was first and foremost shocked that the word ‘Cockettes’ had come out of the mouth of such a well-bred lady, but thus began my fascination with the city.”

LITERARY INFLUENCES
“Christopher Isherwood would have to be at the top of the list for a number of reasons: the clarity of his voice, its identifiable nature, and the dignity and the joy of his life as he lived it. He was a sort of grandfather figure for me, and I think of him often. I’ve been really thrilled to be reading the currently released diaries, which is a huge doorstop but is fabulous for anyone who knew him, because you’re just listening to his voice again. It’s like having your granddad back and he’s telling stories you’ve never heard him tell before.”

Maupin’s 2007 novel Michael Tolliver Lives was inspired by Isherwood: “After The Night Listener I wanted to do a simple first-person novel about a gay man of a certain age who had survived AIDS. I was partially motivated by my love of A Single Man, and my hope was that I could do something rendered in my own style that would reflect the minutiae and the grandeur of a man’s life.

“The person who really made me want to sit down and write was James Kirkwood. I read P.S. Your Cat Is Dead, and the exhilaration I felt reading that really kind of lit a fire under me. I just remember thinking the combination of heart and humor and a certain
darkness was very compelling to me. I remember also that the paperback had a cover that was just white lettering on a black cover, and it said, ‘Your best friend died in September, you’ve been robbed twice, your girlfriend is leaving you, you’ve lost your job . . . and the only one left to talk to is the gay burglar you’ve got tied up in the kitchen. . . . P.S. Your cat is dead.’ That was some brilliant marketing. There must have been a lot of people who bought the book on the basis of that.”

TALES MISCELLANEA

Originally published in a mass circulation newspaper, Tales of the City was never aimed at just gay and lesbian readers. “The varied cast reflected my consciousness that a lot of people were going to be reading Tales. It used to annoy me when gay folks would say, ‘I only read the chapters involving Michael,’ or when people on the social scene would say, ‘I only read about the Halcyons.’ So I got great pleasure when I realized that the plots were going to become so intricately intertwined that no one could understand anything unless they read about everybody.

“The major characters are all aspects of me, and all of the characters are pretty much my own inventions. There are a few exceptions. DeDe Halcyon, the troubled post-debutante of Tales, was not named after any one particular person. There were three DeDes whose names appeared in the social columns of the times, and I borrowed traits from all of them and had a grand time watching them guess who I was talking about. I admit to some caricaturing of some local celebrities, including Pat Motandon, who emerged as [society columnist] Prue Giroux. Pat’s son, Sean Wilsey, who wrote a book about growing up called Oh the Glory of It All, wrote a wonderful blurb that appeared on the back of Mary Ann in Autumn.” Maupin mentioned this at an event for the book. “No sooner had I gotten this out of my mouth than I heard this ‘Yoo-hoo!’ from the back of the room, and it was Pat Motandon herself, still ridiculously glamorous and giving me holy hell in the sweetest kind of way about our long-term relationship. It was actually a very lovely moment. We hugged and I said, ‘I know you can’t hate me too much because you’re described on the jacket of your own memoir [Whispers from God] as “immortalized as a character in Armistead Maupin’s Tales of the City”’”

OPPOSITE Michael “Mouse” Tolliver’s letter to his mother, excerpted from Tales of the City, by Armistead Maupin (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007)
Dear Mama,

I’m sorry it’s taken me so long to write. Every time I try to write you and Papa I realize I’m not saying the things that are in my heart. That would be O.K., if I loved you any less than I do, but you are still my parents and I am still your child.

I have friends who think I’m foolish to write this letter. I hope they’re wrong. I hope their doubts are based on parents who love and trust them less than mine do. I hope especially that you’ll see this as an act of love on my part, a sign of my continuing need to share my life with you. I wouldn’t have written, I guess, if you hadn’t told me about your involvement in the Save Our Children campaign. That, more than anything, made it clear that my responsibility was to tell you the truth, that your own child is homosexual, and that I never needed saving from anything except the cruel and ignorant piety of people like Anita Bryant.

I’m sorry, Mama. Not for what I am, but for how you must feel at this moment. I know what that feeling is, for I felt it for most of my life. Revulsion, shame, disbelief—rejection through fear of something I knew, even as a child, was as basic to my nature as the color of my eyes. No, Mama, I wasn’t “recruited.” No seasoned homosexual ever served as my mentor. But you know what? I wish someone had. I wish someone older than me and wiser than the people in Orlando had taken me aside and said, “You’re all right, kid. You can grow up to be a doctor or a teacher just like anyone else. You’re not crazy or sick or evil. You can succeed and be happy and find peace with friends—all kinds of friends—who don’t give a damn who you go to bed with. Most of all, though, you can love and be loved, without hating yourself for it.”

But no one ever said that to me, Mama. I had to find it out on my own, with the help of the city that has become my home. I know this may be hard for you to believe, but San Francisco is full of men and women, both straight and gay, who don’t consider sexuality in measuring the worth of another human being.

CONTINUED
These aren’t radicals or weirdos, Mama. They are shop clerks and bankers and little old ladies and people who nod and smile to you when you meet them on the bus. Their attitude is neither patronizing nor pitying. And their message is so simple: Yes, you are a person. Yes, I like you. Yes, it’s all right for you to like me too.

I know what you must be thinking now. You’re asking yourself: What did we do wrong? How did we let this happen? Which one of us made him that way?

I can’t answer that, Mama. In the long run, I guess I really don’t care. All I know is this: If you and Papa are responsible for the way I am, then I thank you with all my heart, for it’s the light and the joy of my life.

I know I can’t tell you what it is to be gay. But I can tell you what it’s not.

It’s not hiding behind words, Mama. Like family and decency and Christianity. It’s not fearing your body, or the pleasures that God made for it. It’s not judging your neighbor, except when he’s crass or unkind.

Being gay has taught me tolerance, compassion, and humility. It has shown me the limitless possibilities of living. It has given me people whose passion and kindness and sensitivity have provided a constant source of strength.

It has brought me into the family of man, Mama, and I like it here. I like it.

There’s not much else I can say, except that I’m the same Michael you’ve always known. You just know me better now. I have never consciously done anything to hurt you. I never will.

Please don’t feel you have to answer this right away. It’s enough for me to know that I no longer have to lie to the people who taught me to value the truth.

Mary Ann sends her love.

Everything is fine at 28 Barbary Lane.

Your loving son,

Michael
THE TAPESTRY OF HUMANITY
Armistead Maupin and the Gay Literary Tradition

BY EMILY HOFFMAN

On Valentine’s Day 1977, hundreds of thousands of San Franciscans (not to mention readers all around the Bay and south on the Peninsula), opened their newspapers and saw “Michael Tolliver’s Dirty Thirty for ’77,” the Valentine’s Day resolutions of a young, lovelorn (fictional) gay man. He vowed, among other things: “I will inhale poppers only through the mouth” and “I will sign my real name at The Glory Holes” (as well as “I will meet somebody nice, away from a bar or the tubs or a roller-skating rink, and I will fall hopelessly but conventionally in love”). If words like “poppers” and “glory hole” had not already become household words thanks to Armistead Maupin’s first year of Tales of the City columns, they would by the time he retired from the serial, ten years later.

Like many of history’s great leaps forward, Maupin’s column must have seemed to many a sui generis creation, showing up on their doorsteps like a mysterious casserole, or an abandoned bassinet. In the pages of a daily mainstream newspaper, a gay man was giving his straight friend a cock ring for Christmas; where did that come from? “I was certain that I had some fresh subject matter,” Maupin recalled in a 2010 interview. “In terms of the gay material, those stories were not being told at all.”

Not being told in mainstream media sources, that is; writers have been telling stories of same-sex love for as long as stories have been told. Maupin is part of a long literary tradition, stretching back through the Modernists of the ’40s and ’50s to the Harlem Renaissance, to Oscar Wilde and the decadents, to the all-male Oxbridge colleges of the 19th century, to the writers of the new United States (David Bergman once wrote, “A literature which gives Whitman, Melville, Thoreau, and Henry James significant places cannot be said to underrepresent homosexual writers”), all the way back to ancient Greece. Maupin would be the first to tell you this. His bookshelf, John Patterson noted in a 2006 article, is crammed with the works of his literary forebears: Gore Vidal, w. h. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, and Plato, to name but a few.

The gay literary tradition is as personal as it is scholarly. Far from a decree handed down from elite scholars on high, the canon has been actively created and solidified by the writers who make up its ranks. As Gregory Woods writes in A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition, once gay men “developed a need for something identifiable as their own culture, they looked not only to the future—by producing ‘a literature of their own’ . . . —but also to the past.” The gay literati of the 20th century created a tradition
through such public means as gay salons, publishing houses, bookstores, anthologies, and the like. Less formally, communities of friends and lovers have always lived at the heart of this lineage. Thus gay novelist Sam Stewart once sought out and seduced an aged Lord Alfred Douglas in Paris—and once, at a book signing, autographed Armistead Maupin’s copy of the book, “To Armistead Maupin, one of the few successful tillers of the field. And in bed, WOW!” He explained: “Well, I’m not being presumptuous. I think this’ll be useful to you in years to come. You’ll be able to tell people that you slept with the man who slept with the man who slept with Oscar Wilde.”

Wilde is not an unsuitable point of origin for a discussion of the gay literary tradition from which Armistead Maupin descends. Though same-sex love and desire can be found in texts as early as Plato’s Symposium, it is an anachronism to call literature that predates the Victorian era “gay”; scholars such as Michel Foucault have argued that homosexuality as an identity (rather than an activity) is an invention of the 19th century. Wilde, who died in 1900, is arguably the first gay literary celebrity.

The English academic Alan Sinfield has called the 20th century “the Wilde century.” Wilde’s dandyism and his searing wit make up no small part of his legacy, but there is also a darker side. Convicted in 1895 of “gross indecency,” Wilde was sentenced to two years’ hard labor, despite the rousing speech he delivered from the dock invoking a gay tradition of his own: “The love that dare not speak its name’ in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect.” The story of Wilde’s demise (he died in exile two years after being released from prison), as well as his
overtly homosexual texts—including *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (in which he wrote, famously, “each man kills the thing he loves”)—make him the symbolic mascot of a literary tradition Woods calls that of the “tragic queer”: “I am referring to a specifically literary quality of fatedness which casts the queer as an inglorious version of the tragic hero.” This tradition pervades the explicitly homosexual writings of homosexual authors (the great majority of their writings, by contrast, being closeted) in the first half of the 20th century: André Gide, Jean Genet, D. H. Lawrence—to name but a few. Woods sums up the tragic narrative as follows: “A man’s homosexuality amounts to a tragic flaw. What he loves to distraction leads him to destruction. From the moment of his rise, he is fated to fall. The one sexual act which defines him, anal intercourse, inevitably unmans him. Even at its gentlest, it is an act of merciless violence. Ultimately, it will be responsible for his death. . . . It would be laughable if it weren’t so dangerous.”

E. M. Forster, one of Maupin’s heroes, was among the first writers to buck the tragic convention. Forster is best known for his earlier novels that do not treat the subject of homosexuality at all: *A Room with a View* (1908) and *Passage to India* (1924). In his less-famous work *Maurice* (written in 1913 but not published until 1971, a year after Forster’s death), he insisted on creating a happy ending for the gay hero. In Forster’s opinion it was the happy ending, rather than the fact that the novel dealt explicitly with homosexuality, that made *Maurice* unpublishable. It is also, unfortunately, part of what makes the novel, in Woods’s opinion, “intolerably boring.”

Maupin’s greatest literary friend and mentor, Christopher Isherwood (whose gay literary friendships in turn included Forster, Auden, Vidal, Tennessee Williams, and Truman Capote), born later than Forster, began to publish openly gay works within his own lifetime. Isherwood’s early career followed not in the tradition of the tragic queer but in the tradition of the silent one. Thrilling gay readers and scholars, Isherwood wrote explicitly about the self-censorship of his early (and, again, more famous) works, like *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935) and his novel-memoir *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), in his 1976 autobiography, *Christopher and His Kind*. In *Goodbye to Berlin*, Isherwood describes Otto (his then boyfriend, he later admitted): “Otto certainly has a superb pair of shoulders and chest for a boy of his age—but his body is nevertheless somehow slightly ridiculous. The beautiful ripe lines of the torso taper away too suddenly to his rather absurd little buttocks and spin-dly, immature legs.” In *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood writes that he “nearly gives himself away” in his admiring description of Otto’s torso, and so included the critical bit about the legs “lest the reader should suspect him of finding Otto physically attractive.” Indeed, he adds, Otto had “an entirely adequate, sturdy pair of legs.”
A combination of timing and character landed Maupin firmly in the tradition of *Maurice* and *Christopher and His Kind*; Maupin has always been an “out” writer. “For me,” Maupin said in a 2006 article in the *Guardian*, “the revolution was always about visibility. Always. It’s why I’m now so adamant about outing. It’s why, in the most natural way possible, homosexuality works its way into my storylines, makes itself part of the fabric of the world. The whole goal of my work was to put myself out there and by doing so, demystify that world for other people.” This is not to say that Maupin didn’t show up at his first meetings with the *San Francisco Chronicle* in an Oxford button-down and blue blazer, every bit the southern gentleman from Raleigh, North Carolina. He also had Michael Tolliver (a.k.a. Mouse a.k.a. one of Maupin’s fictional avatars) wait in the column’s wings until his six-week, 30-column trial period with the *Chronicle* had concluded.

Soon, though, Maupin’s column was a no-holds-barred celebration of any and every permutation of desire and identity. A chart kept by the managing editor at the *Chronicle* to track the number of straight and gay characters in the series soon became hopelessly muddled, and then nothing more than a joke. Maupin was emboldened by the overwhelmingly positive response *Tales of the City* received from a fan base that quickly began to photocopy the column and send it to friends and family members across the country.

By the time Maupin was writing *Tales of the City*, a new dominant trope had emerged in gay literature. It was a time of formational narratives for the gay community, and there was strong pressure for those narratives to be positive: “From the late 1960s to the early 1980s,” Woods writes, “nothing so severely limited the range of out gay novelists as the imperative to provide relentlessly positive images and unambiguously happy endings. Anything less would have been dismissed by gay reviewers as negative at best, at worst self-hating.” In a searing 1986 critique titled “Is Lesbian Culture Only for Beginners?” Sarah Schulman wrote, “In what appears to me to be an attempt to manufacture, rather than reflect lesbian
culture, like the Stalinists we have developed a sort of lesbian Socialist Realism which has come to dominate lesbian fiction.”

In part because of his Hitchcockian plot twists, in part because of his wicked humor, in part because he wrote about sexuality with a more fluid and “queer” (and 21st-century) sensibility than many of the other gay writers of his time, and in large part because of the nature of the serial format, Maupin was able to avoid the trap of somewhere-over-the-rainbow endings. In “Making ‘Gay’ and ‘Lesbian’ into Household Words: How Serial Form Works in Armistead Maupin’s Tales of the City,” Robyn R. Warhol, an English professor at Ohio State University who studies narrative and gender, argues that “in an ironic twist worthy of one of his own outrageous plots, Maupin appropriates serial form—arguably the most Victorian of narrative conventions—to prorogue a profoundly anti-‘Victorian,’ anticonventional version of sexual life.” Because serials must always continue, they must always defer the happy guy-gets-the-girl (or guy-gets-the-guy) ending—perhaps even indefinitely. “In serials,” Warhol writes, “the story never really comes to an end; the closure is always momentary; the climax—even if it is orgasmic—never has to mean the pleasure is over.” The serial format itself, Warhol suggests, played a crucial role in allowing Maupin to express his vision of transformation, malleable desires, and unconventional family structures. Woods puts Maupin in a class of gay writers who helped reinvent the meaning of family: “It is not so much the physical reality of 28 Barbary Lane, the house itself,” Woods writes, “as the network of relationships it represents that is presented by Maupin as having provided so effective an alternative to the nuclear family.”

Woods goes to lengths to mention that it is not only the gay characters, but also the straight characters, who take part in and benefit from Maupin’s vision of a nonnuclear family. This is perhaps one of Maupin’s greatest triumphs: his ability to speak to a universal without compromising any of the specificity of his subculture. “The real triumph of the work was that I succeeded in creating a tapestry large enough to encompass all of human-
ity,” Maupin was quoted in a 2001 article. “The fact that I did that from a gay perspective is what makes the work radical, in my eyes.”

Maupin’s reception as a gay writer has shifted radically since he published his first Tales column in 1976. In Patrick Gale’s biography, Maupin recounts the struggle to market the novels into which the columns were later collected:

The irony was that I had to convince them that there was a gay market when we first started selling the book. I said, “Put something on the jacket that indicates there’s something in here for gay people.” And they were very wary of doing that. I remember my editor saying to me, “Oh, Armistead. Toujours gay. Toujours gay.” Then in later years, when I’d really got my foothold, they were trying to angle it exclusively to the gay market. When I was trying to say to them, “Look, there’s nothing about this story that won’t appeal to the general population. Stop confining me to this area,” they didn’t understand. Back at the newspaper I had already felt the exhilaration of being a big old queer in a mainstream context. Nothing was more fun. It struck a blow for freedom and let you be part of the world at the same time. And I knew I could do that on a national scale. In those days I didn’t dream of an international scale. But I felt it would work eventually for the rest of America and they finally had the sense to sell it that way.

Maupin trusted his readers; he didn’t do any hand-holding around his gay content. “For the most part,” Maupin said in a 2001 article, “I was reflecting the life I saw around me, but the dream of total integration that is shown in Tales is more true now than it was 30 years ago. . . . I’m very proud of the fact that I was able to imagine that ease somewhat before it happened.”

Maupin not only imagined the ease; his columns were a major force in creating it. Tales of the City participated in the mainstreaming of gay culture as perhaps no other individual creation has since. Speaking of Tales’s reincarnation as a Peabody Award–winning tv show in the early ’90s, Maupin said in a 2010 interview, “The gay-male, straight-woman relationship in Will and Grace, we did that first. The domestic lesbians on Ellen, same thing.” “My goal,” Maupin has said, “is the day it becomes boring—the day it’s just people and relationships, and we just leave it at that.”

Bored with their game of monte, the Fog, the Wind, and the Devil set out from Los Angeles for a friendly stroll up the Pacific Coast towards San Francisco. The Wind asked the Devil, “How is it that all the most beautiful places along this shore are named after saints?” The Devil smiled and replied with a wink, “I sent the Jesuits before I came with instructions to take all the best places, and since I would get the people, the saints might get the names.” They sauntered on until they reached San Francisco’s Golden Gate, the strait where the ocean meets the bay. *Chrysopylae*, it had been called by the scholarly army scout John C. Frémont, recalling that famous harbor of Byzantium, *Chrysoceras*, the Golden Horn, Constantinople’s port to all the riches of the East. The trio climbed to the tallest of the area’s many green hills, and they could see it all: to the west, the sea; to the north and east, the bay, and beyond it, islands and mainlands. They breathed in a climate made for wine, fruits, and flowers.

Weary from walking (as one might be after 400 miles) the Wind went to sleep among the sand dunes, while the Fog laid himself down by the sea. But the never-tiring Devil decided to take a swim. He removed his horns and hoofs and tail, setting them out upon Seal Rock, just off the northwest shore. When he returned from his dip, he found that a walrus had swum off with his horns to use as tusks; a goat had scampered away with his hoofs; and, down from Mount Tamalpais across the strait, a spirit had snatched his tail. The Devil roused his friends, who swore to him a solemn oath never to leave San Francisco until the thieves were found.

This “true and faithful narrative,” recorded by the San Francisco *Argonaut* in 1877, accounts for the drifting, searching Fog of San Francisco’s *paene insula* (“almost an island”) and the Wind that sweeps our city—and the Devil that lurks nearby to tempt us—mythologizing the city’s iconic climate while alluding to its inhabitants’ penchant for wicked diversions. One hundred years later, in 1976, when the *San Francisco Chronicle* began running Armistead Maupin’s new mythology, *Tales of the City*, it was clear that the Fog, Wind, and sin had not yet settled. Yet, despite the weather’s damp and dreary chill, San Francisco, a diverse patchwork of 48 neighborhoods sharing a 47-square-mile quilt of urban humanity blanketing the city’s 44 hills, has always claimed a warm culture of civility. Although far from having an unsullied record of acceptance, it has been the country’s, per-
haps the world’s, most welcoming and openhearted city. Almost an island, but not quite, it is perhaps as close to the mythical paradise of Atlantis as can be hoped for, where wayward souls flock to find other wayward souls with whom to build their lives.

THE WORLD’S ONCE-HIDDEN TREASURE: SAN FRANCISCO’S ORIGINS

In 1976 San Francisco celebrated its bicentennial with citywide festivities: In Golden Gate Park there was a reenactment of the first settlers, who had arrived in 1775 with Captain Juan Manuel de Ayala on a small Spanish packet boat, the San Carlos. Across town to the southeast, Archbishop McGucken offered Pontifical Mass in the Mission Dolores Basilica, not far from where in 1776 Father Palou had blessed a small wooden church, established to save the souls of the native Ohlone. Across town to the north, there was a luncheon at the Officers Club of the Presidio, a military outpost established in 1776 as the fist of el brazo del mar (“the arm of the sea”), the northernmost bastion of the North American Spanish frontier, ceded to Mexico in 1821.

The true foundation of modern San Francisco, however, dates back to 1835, when an enterprising young captain, William A. Richardson, erected the first building of the pueblo Yerba Buena (“good grass”). In 1847 the United States acquired Yerba Buena during the Mexican-American War and renamed the town San Francisco, which then boasted just 459
inhabitants. Two years later, the Golden Gate earned its name when promises of riches in the foothills nearby brought the world to the region overnight.

In 1976 San Francisco, one could find a unique collection of unassimilated ethnicities defining a number of neighborhoods. The most famous of these neighborhoods was Chinatown, the largest and oldest Chinese district in the United States, but enclaves of Russian, Italian, Japanese, and Mexican descendants (and others) also dotted the cultural landscape. This diversity dates back to the 1849 Gold Rush, when a city was quickly built to accommodate a population that boomed from 850 in 1848 to 36,151 by 1852. (Of the hundreds of thousands who passed through, those are just the people who decided to stay. Many fortune seekers were Americans, but the entire globe was represented. The first to arrive were from Peru and Chile. Tens of thousands of Chinese immigrants joined the pursuit of riches. Travelers from all of Europe, Turkey, Brazil, the Caribbean (and the list goes on) followed. San Francisco was a veritable city of Babel, with an endless mixing of languages and customs on streets so muddy they swallowed wagons whole. These pilgrims rented bunks, tabletops, and rocking chairs to sleep on and converted ships abandoned in the harbor into bars, prisons, and insane asylums.

The stampede of newcomers included wanderers, misfits, escaped slaves, and exconvicts (from the penal colonies of Australia, notably). They were people ditching their pasts in hope of a more prosperous and adventurous future. And they were almost all male. More than 90 percent of the city’s new residents were men younger than 40—away from home, away from women, making their way in a lawless multicultural melting pot of financial uncertainty. Some sought refuge in religion, but most found comfort in alcohol, drugs, and gambling. The nation’s largest and most notorious red light district—named the Barbary Coast after the pirate-ridden shore of North Africa—made the young boomtown famous for prostitution and other forms of naughty entertainment. One particularly bad section of the Barbary Coast, called Devil’s Acre, saw a murder a week and five brawls a day. Soon after the gold cache had been tapped out, San Francisco became the Silver City when the Nevada Comstock Lode (the first major discovery of silver ore in the United States) brought a second wave of wealth.

Those who became rich began to stabilize their new home. Victorian houses rose. Parks and theaters were built. Cable car lines were installed. Blending seamlessly with the area’s natural beauty, the city became a place of charm and inspiration likened to Paris, Rome, Florence, and Peking. Graduates from Stanford and the University of California added a new layer of sophistication. But even as the “wide-open city” grew legitimate, it retained its initial anything-goes spirit and its oft-mentioned flavor of the Arabian Nights. The Barbary Coast remained a destination for the port city’s ever-present seamen until the
California Red Light Abatement Act of 1913 killed it and Prohibition buried it. During Prohibition, the city nevertheless remained the “wettest of the west” as revelers continued reveling in speakeasies and clubs. The Depression came, but the diversions continued; referring to this period, when the rest of the country suffered and had little cause for celebration, Mr. San Francisco, famed San Francisco Chronicle columnist Herb Caen, reported that San Francisco “never seemed busier.”

“[San Francisco is] the genius of American cities,” wrote author William Saroyan in 1940. “The wild-eyed, all-fired, hard-boiled, tender-hearted, white-haired boy of the American family of cities. It is the prodigal son; the city which does everything and is always forgiven, because of its great heart, its gentle smile, its roaring laughter, its mysterious and magnificent personality.” During World War II, the city’s Embarcadero was a supply and staging area for Pacific campaigns. Wartime industry throughout the city bustled, bringing the area’s first significant influx of Black Americans. And, once again, the city sang to young men looking to distract themselves with quick thrills before going off into the unknown. These sailors and soldiers had discovered an enchanted place, seemingly detached from the rest of the world, and when the war ended, many returned.

COUNTERCULTURE: THE BEATS AND HIPPIES OF THE ’50s AND ’60S
By the 1950s, San Francisco had “grown respectable, though not quite staid,” according to Herb Caen. Like the rest of post–World War II America, the city was settling down a little, attempting to make more mature, farsighted decisions for its adolescent bohemia. But the Wind still tickled the imagination and the Fog still promised an endless supply of unseen surprises. And the Devil still crept about under the cover of mist. San Francisco remained a city of romance, mused Caen, “where a hint of adventure hangs tantalizingly in the cool air”; but “the old, expansive days of legendary glory may be past.” Caen longed for the magic of an era gone by, the period before and between the world wars, before “the New San Franciscans arrived for any number of unromantic reasons.” Starting in the 1950s, “It is still the best of all possible cities, am I right?” became the chronicler’s frequent refrain, each time asked with a little less certainty.

But for the younger generation, the excitement was just beginning, and even Caen could not deny that “San Francisco does all things—good and bad, in a big way.” The Beat generation took over North Beach’s cheap apartments, bars, cafés, and jazz clubs, which became the global focal point for a counterculture that refused to accept new postwar prosperity as a justification for conformity. These were young men and women disillusioned by mainstream American society, coming together to seek out new lifestyles that rejected conventional (and commercial) values and standards. They found intellectual camaraderie
at City Lights (a library/bookstore of progressive literature), smoke-filled bistros, artist galleries, and apartment salons. Some gathered in the laid-back realms of mind-expanding drugs and multitudinous sexual partnerships; others assembled to fight the System in civil rights, free speech, and peace demonstrations.

The revolution was made famous by prominent artists and performers who championed San Francisco for its permissiveness, a place where the police knew that looking the other way often made for good policy. “Nobody cared what you did as long as you didn’t commit any gross public crimes. They let you alone, and, however much you might have puzzled them, they respected you as an artist,” said poet Kenneth Rexroth, father of the Beat literary scene, remembering fondly the differences between San Francisco and places even as liberal as New York and Paris. “There is no question but that the San Francisco renaissance is radically different from what is going on elsewhere. . . . Nowhere else is there a whole younger generation culture pattern characterized by total rejection of the official highbrow culture.”

With fame came unwanted popularity, however, dragging the Beats from their anarchist margins into the deathly mainstream. Tourists and wannabes sent the sunglasses-, turtleneck-, sandal-wearing beatniks across town to the Haight-Ashbury district, just east of Golden Gate Park. Students from San Francisco State College—wearing vintage clothes from thrift stores, often appearing as pseudo-Edwardian dandies—were already flocking there for its low rents. In this new neighborhood, dropping out of society remained popular, as did long unwashed hair, communal living, Eastern philosophies, jazz music, marijuana (the new yerba buena), free love, and peace. The movement was still a private revolution of individu-
ality and diversity, but the political Flower People and Love Children of the 1960s also wanted their community, the Spiritual Capital of the Love Generation, to raise social awareness. Out went the dark solitary look of the Beat hipster; in came the loud, colorful uniform of the hippie—someone who “dresses like Tarzan, has hair like Jane, and smells like Cheetah,” according to then California governor Ronald Reagan. In the mid ’60s, LSD, a hallucinogenic tested by the CIA down at Stanford, was introduced into the Haight-Ashbury district, just as the British Invasion was teaching America how to rock ’n’ roll. Merry bands of young musicians who had previously played acoustic folk and bluegrass were discovering a new electric sound that synced perfectly with an acid trip’s peaceful, “uninterrupted stream of fantastic pictures, extraordinary shapes . . . [and] intense, kaleidoscopic play of colors,” as the experience was described by LSD synthesizer Albert Hoffman. For some, the drug was an entry way into the mystical insights of the meaning of existence.

After LSD was made illegal in late 1966, hippies staged a gentle gathering of the tribes called The Human Be-In on the Polo Field of Golden Gate Park (momentarily and unofficially renamed “People’s Park”) in January 1967. The event promised to “shower the country with waves of ecstasy and purification. Fear will be washed away; ignorance will be exposed to sunlight; profits and empire will lie drying on deserted beaches; violence will be submerged and transmuted in rhythm and dancing,” according to the Berkeley Barb. Before an audience of 25,000 flower-carrying, ribbon-wearing men and women, Beat poets offered poetry and prayers and The Grateful Dead, The Jefferson Airplane, and
Quicksilver Messenger Service jammed. This was just a prelude to the 1967 Summer of Love. What had started as a private subculture became a very public denouncement of the Vietnam War, the conservatism of the older generation, and the mainstream media, which ironically promoted the phenomenon to the country’s battalions of disaffected youth. The summer of ’67 saw Haight-Ashbury’s population swell from 7,000 to 75,000.

The Summer of Love was to be the hippies’ last hurrah. Paradise was quickly lost to unsustainable overpopulation; heroin and crystal meth replaced acid; organized crime and poverty flooded the area. But the hippie experiment of personal freedom and urban families was not a failure; it paved the way for the next manifestation of cultural transformation.

**A “HAVEN FOR DEVIANTS”: THE 1970S AND AMERICA’S GAY CAPITAL**

The 1970s ushered in a new social revolution that arguably exceeded the social flouting of the Beats and the hippies. San Francisco’s new revolutionaries were the homosexuals who found sanctuary in this historic “haven for deviants,” so called in a 1970 issue of *transaction* Magazine. World War II had been the first conflict in which homosexuality warranted a dishonorable discharge from the military. The dismissed men and women were loaded onto “queer ships” and sent to nearby port cities, including San Francisco. Faced with ostracization at home, many stayed. Other soldiers who had managed to keep their sexuality a secret, and who had passed through San Francisco on their way to the Pacific theater (and liked what they had seen), returned.

Despite its reputation as the most sexually permissive city in the country—with evidence of open homosexuality dating back to the Gold Rush and a waterfront that had been generally accepted as a gay cruising area at least as far back as the 1920s, according to anthropologist Gayle S. Rubin—on the books, San Francisco was no more lenient than anywhere else. San Francisco’s first recorded gay bar, The Dash, was shut down in 1908, and for much of the first half of the 20th century customers of gay-friendly bars were routinely harassed. The forced closure of gay-friendly businesses remained legal until a California Supreme Court decision outlawed the practice in 1951.

In 1949, the California penal code outlawed gay sex (among other “unnatural” styles). Elsewhere in the country, gays retreated from such restrictions into their closets; in San Francisco they fought back. The 1930s saw a wave of gay-oriented nightclubs like the Black Cat Club, Finnochio’s, and Mona’s Club presenting cross-dressing cabaret entertainment. San Francisco’s first lesbian bar, Mona’s opened in North Beach in 1936. The world’s first recorded lesbian organization, the Daughters of Bilitis, began meeting and publishing their groundbreaking newsletter (*The Ladder*) in 1955. In 1960, they hosted the first national lesbian conference. In the 1960s, gay establishments united as the Tavern Guild and refused to pay
police bribes, forming the first association of gay businesses in the country. In 1969, *Knight* magazine announced that, thanks to support from San Francisco’s straight public, with its long history of embracing minority groups, the city had become “the most brazen, organized homosexual community in America.”

Like the city’s ethnic minorities, gay men and women created enclaves. In the 1960s, these were concentrated in the Polk Gulch/Tenderloin areas north of Market Street and the Folsom Street area South of Market (SoMa). Polk Street was a commercial center of gay bars and shops with a concentration of male hustlers, drag queens, and transsexual sex workers. The area also boasted dimly lit bathhouses, buildings with hallways of steamy rooms seemingly designed specifically for diverse sex acts with anonymous partners. The main area of intense gay nightlife was in SoMa. First settled during the Gold Rush as a tent city, this industrial district, deserted at night, gave rise to leather bars like The Tool Box, where customers often donned hypermasculine attire—a protest against earlier depictions in the media of homosexuals as effeminate pansies. In the 1970s, SoMa was the bacchanalian heart of gay San Francisco, and those who frequented the neighborhood could find and do anything they desired. Sexual indulgence not seen since the heyday of the Barbary Coast returned to San Francisco.

By the 1970s, San Francisco had secured its reputation as the “homosexual capital of the United States.” Between 1969 and 1973, an estimated 900 gay men moved to San Francisco; from 1974 to 1979, some 20,000 arrived. A police survey in 1976 suggested that 140,000 out of San Francisco’s population of 700,000 were gay or lesbian, with more flying up from Los Angeles on the weekends.

Just as important as the new freedom gay men and women found in San Francisco to openly embrace their sexuality was their opportunity to live openly in stable communities. Not everyone was interested in promiscuity; like their heterosexual counterparts, many
gay men and women were looking for lasting relationships. During the 1970s, these were not always easy to come by (or, if you had them, easy to hold on to), because, as Gabriel Day remembers in his 1982 article in *Christopher Street* magazine, “you don’t find permanence in a candy store.” Gay men began settling the affordable Castro District, reviving the declining neighborhood at the west end of Market Street and creating a community of gay-owned businesses serving gay customers. According to Rubin, Folsom Street was nicknamed the Valley of the Kings for its cocky masculinity. Polk Street was dubbed the Valley of the Queens after the older generation of more effeminate gay men associated with the area. The Castro came to be known as the Valley of the Dolls, alluding to the area’s attractive young men, whose manly look of tight Levis, t-shirts, work boots, and expensive plaid shirts was not as harsh as the leather look of SoMa. Folsom Street remained the city’s sexual fulcrum, but the Castro became the residential, and political, center of the gay world, while still boasting its share of cruise-oriented cafés, bars, and restaurants. As housing costs in the Castro rose, gay men and women created new neighborhoods in Potrero Hill and Bernal Heights; where they went, social, cultural, and religious institutions followed.

The growing number of established populations gave gay men and women something they had never before enjoyed—political clout. In 1970, Sally Gearhart and Rick Stokes were the first openly gay employees hired by the city, serving at the Family Service Agency. In 1971, the *Bay Area Reporter*, the city’s longest continuous gay publication and one of the oldest gay newspapers in the country, began printing. Also in 1971, future mayor Dianne Feinstein, then president of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, spoke in front of the Society for Individual Rights (the largest homophile organization in the country, formed in 1964); it was the first time a city official appeared publicly before a gay group. Since 1972, the strength of the city’s gay population has annually been on display during the Gay Freedom Day Parade. Also in 1972, the Board of Supervisors banned gay discrimination in municipal employment. In 1975, state politicians passed the Consenting Adult Sex Bill, repealing California’s sodomy laws. And in 1977, Harvey Milk, a prominent neighborhood political leader, became the first openly gay man elected to any substantial political office in history when he was seated on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

**1976 AND PROGRESSIVE NOSTALGIA**

For such a young city, San Francisco is a surprisingly nostalgic place. To this day, when you hear the fog horn or the bell of the cable car; when you climb Telegraph Hill or cross the bay by ferry, or visit the windmills that once watered all of Golden Gate Park; when you walk around the neighborhoods with their Victorian houses and authentic old-country charm; when you look out from Coit Tower upon the ribboned bridges and the hazel mountains
of the Pacific coastal range; you are transported through the mist to an earlier era. The 1970s, and especially 1976, in particular, were a unique moment in San Francisco history, when acceptance was at its peak, and progress and nostalgia coexisted in harmony.

According to a Gallup poll at the time, entering the 1970s San Francisco was America’s favorite city, beating out the more populous and economically/culturally busy metropolises of New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Los Angeles. Out of the rumble and ashes of the 1906 earthquake and three days of 52 fires (more devastating in terms of lives and structures lost than the Great Fire of London and the Great Chicago Fire combined), San Francisco had been reborn greater, grander, and more beautiful, built for the generations who were to come. Following World War II a progrowth coalition of top business and political leaders sought the Manhattanization of the downtown commercial district and surrounding areas, hoping for more influence on the global economy. Grumblings from local interest groups over the demolition of neighborhoods, the high-rise perversion of the skyline, and attacks on San Francisco’s more unique fixtures were immediate. Resistance prevented skyscrapers from going west and north (protecting Chinatown and North Beach’s Italian community). The Ferry Building was saved, even though the bridges crossing the bay had obviated the need to commute by boat. The anachronistic cable cars were not torn out.

Tired of constantly battling the government to preserve their city’s identity, groups rallied behind progressive California senator George Moscone’s run for mayor. In 1975, Moscone changed San Francisco politics forever. San Francisco had been a tough labor town with conservative politicians beholden to unions, businesses, and homeowners. Bringing together liberals, environmentalists, populists, and neighborhood activists, and seeking support from gays and lesbians, racial minorities, and the middle class by running on a campaign of slow-growth and civil rights, Moscone successfully ousted the old guard. His victory represented a political unification that resembled the hodgepodge groupings of
San Francisco society itself. In 1976, Moscone took office with an unabashedly liberal social agenda—opening City Hall to previously excluded groups—and with an eye to protecting San Francisco’s history and mystique.

The social progress found in San Francisco in 1976 had been years in the making—200 of them—but considering the unique history of this mysterious multicultural city of wind, fog, and urban families, it is not hard to understand why even progressives were nostalgic. Looking back, they saw their forebears looking forward. But this moment could not last. In 1978, a man nostalgic for a different side of San Francisco’s history, one that resented the growing gay and minority populations (“splinter groups of radicals, social deviates, and incorrigibles,” he called them), crept into City Hall and assassinated Moscone and Milk. Dianne Feinstein, the centrist who replaced Moscone as mayor, claimed this violent act proved that “the city is best run from the center of the political spectrum, rather than from either extreme.” Soon the 1980s AIDS epidemic tamed the unbridled sexual freedom enjoyed just years before. The city was forced to grow up. But just as times of celebration had brought communities together, so, too, did these years of heartache.

In 1989, another major earthquake rocked the Bay Area; with the internet boom of the 1990s came a new Gold Rush. The Fog and Wind still hunt the cunning thieves who hoodwinked the Devil, and we remain nostalgic, this time looking back through rose-tinted glass at the 1970s as we progress ever onward into the 21st century.

SOURCES
THE LOST CITY OF ATLANTIS

BY DAN RUBIN

If we are to believe his writings, the Greek philosopher Plato (427–347 B.C.E) heard of Atlantis when the oligarch Critias described the island to Plato’s teacher, Socrates. Critias had heard it from his grandfather, who had heard it from the famous lawmaker Solon. Solon had heard it from two learned and capable priests. According to the historian Plutarch, however, Plato was prone to elaboration: “[He] adorned the subject of lost Atlantis, as if it were the soil of a fair estate unoccupied. . . . He began the work by laying out great porches, enclosures, and courtyards, such as no story, tale, or poesy ever had before.” In Critias and Timaeus, Plato appropriated an actual civilization, complains Plutarch 500 years later, on which the philosopher built his mythical paradise. Plato did not deny Atlantis was a real place—just west of the Pillars of Hercules in the Strait of Gibraltar (where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Mediterranean Sea)—but, considering it existed 9,000 years before his time and its entire population was wiped out by an angry god, he probably was not worried about offending.

Plato writes in Critias that, when the gods divided up the earth, Poseidon took the island of Atlantis. From him and the local woman Kleito (granddaughter of Gaia) sprang a race of kings who would rule the kingdom, eldest son to eldest son. For generations they lived in peace, governing themselves according to laws passed down from Poseidon himself. The most important of these: “That they should never take up arms against one another.”

Of course, they had no reason to. This blissful island cluster full of marshes, lakes, rivers, mountains, and plains provided everything the inhabitants needed: wood, livestock, every imaginable crop. Flowers and fruits provided sweet aromas and perfumes. The mines produced orichalcum (mountain copper), the most precious metal next to gold. “That sacred island . . . brought forth fair and wondrous [bounty] and in infinite abundance,” writes the philosopher, but it was because Atlanteans valued virtue over wealth that they prospered:

They possessed true and in every way great spirits, uniting gentleness with wisdom in the various chances of life, and in their intercourse with one another. They despised everything but virtue, caring little for their present state of life, and thinking lightly of the possession of gold and other property, which seemed only a burden to them; neither were they intoxicated by luxury; nor did wealth deprive them of their self-control; but they were sober, and saw clearly that all
these goods are increased by virtue and friendship with one another, whereas by too great regard and respect for them, they are lost and friendship with them.

In this world of beauty, the kings had little to do other than make it more beautiful. They built bridges and harbors. They built temples for Poseidon and palaces for themselves, each trying to out-adorn their predecessor.
When Sir Thomas More (1478–1535 C.E.), diplomat and lord chancellor under Henry VIII, adopted Plato’s myth of Atlantis for his sociopolitical treatise *Utopia*, he, too, spoke of a fictional place described to him by an imaginary traveler, a sailor named Raphael Hythloday. More’s Utopia was conquered by Utopus, who “brought the rude and uncivilized inhabitants into such a good government, and to that measure of politeness, that they now far excel all the rest of mankind.” Hythloday tells us via More that Utopia, like San Francisco, was once a peninsula, but Utopus separated it from land with a 15-mile-wide channel, transforming it into a crescent-shaped island. It is impossible to find except by accident, and once found, its perilous bay is difficult to navigate.

Utopia, like Atlantis, boasts harbors and bridges (“consisting of many stately arches”), but, unlike the adorned palaces of Atlantis, the buildings of Utopia are utilitarian. All the houses of Utopia look alike, as do all the towns—as do all the people, who wear matching uniforms. It is a communal civilization of agriculture and trade in which nobody wants for anything. War is detested (although both men and women are trained to fight, if need be) and money is not used because everything is collectively owned. All religions are tolerated (so long as they are monotheistic), but it is mostly a civilization of conformity. The laws are simple, and deviants are punished harshly. For example, if young men and women engage in “forbidden embraces” before marriage, they must live lives of chastity unless and until they obtain a special dispensation from the prince. Other criminals are sentenced to slavery. And yet, Utopia is an empire of the most beautiful gardens and a population “better governed and living happier than we,” according to More’s fictional reporter.

A hundred years after More wrote *Utopia*, the natural philosopher and scientist Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626) wrote *New Atlantis*, a first-person adventure to the island of Bersalem (“son of peace”). Bersalem is an idyllic place built on a foundation of strong Christian principles, populated after Plato’s Atlantis (which Bacon believed to be America) was destroyed. In *New Atlantis*, a ship of weary and wind-tossed travelers, out of food and hope, find salvation when the sea guides them to a secret empire. The inhabitants of Bersalem take the crew in and heal their sick with a magically medicinal fruit. The natives refuse all payment for their service; this island is one of abundance and money has no value. “Humanity and policy [have joined] together,” explains the narrator, and the island is “a picture of our salvation in heaven.” Not only is it a land of extraordinary foods, it is a place of science that is technologically much more advanced than ours.

---

1“Utopia is a compound of the syllable *eu*, meaning good, and *topos*, meaning place. But the homonymous prefix *ou*, with the meaning ‘no,’ also resonates in the word: the perfectly ‘good place’ is really ‘no place.’” “No Place on Earth: Beinecke Exhibition Explores American Utopias,” http://www.library.yale.edu/beinecke/brblevents/blutopia.htm.

2According to *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought*, Hythloday’s name in Greek translates as “distributor of nonsense.”
Bersalem exists on no maps and only very occasionally is stumbled upon by lost sailors, who, as we see, are welcomed with generous hospitality. The inhabitants purposefully keep quiet about their home’s existence when they travel out into the world to collect information; this is how they protect it from outside vice. But they invite lost travelers to become permanent members of their community, and most of those travelers accept their offer: only 13 have returned home over the course of the society’s more-than-1,000-year history. “What those few that returned may have reported abroad, I know not,” explains a governor of Bersalem to the shipmates. “But you must think, whatsoever they have said, could be taken where they came but for a dream.”

Although their locations are nearly impossible to find, Bersalem and Utopia still exist, according to Bacon and More. The island historians in Bacon’s account, however, remember the destruction of the original Atlantis: “Atlantis was utterly lost and destroyed: not by a great earthquake, as your man [Plato] saith . . . but by a particular deluge or inundation.” According to Plato, the perfection that had been Atlantis could not sustain itself over the generations, as the population’s ties to Poseidon weakened and “the divine portion began to fade away, and became diluted too often and too much with the mortal admixture, and the human nature got the upper hand.” Atlanteans were still beautiful to look upon, but “being unable to bear their fortune, behaved unseemly, and . . . grew visibly debased, for they were losing the fairest of their precious gifts.” They were no longer happy. They became lawless with ambition and power. It was then that Zeus, “perceiving that an honorable race was in a woeful plight, and wanting to inflict punishment on them, that they might be chastened and improve, collected all the gods into their most holy habitation, which, being placed in the center of the world, beholds all created things. And when he had called them together, he spake as follows:”

It is here that the text breaks off. Plato never finished his account. “He was late in the beginning, and ended his life before his work,” explains Plutarch. But we know from Plato’s earlier writing Timaeus, which contains a truncated depiction of Atlantis, that violent earthquakes rocked the empire and floods sank it, and “the island of Atlantis . . . disappeared in the depths of the sea.”

A TALES OF THE CITY TIMELINE: 1976–77

1976

The Consenting Adult Sex Bill, passed in California in May 1975, becomes effective in January. The bill—which repeals the state's sodomy law, making gay sex legal for the first time—was championed by State Senator George Moscone, who was elected mayor of San Francisco in November 1975.

On March 20, after a three-month high-profile trial in a federal court in San Francisco, Patty Hearst, socialite granddaughter of publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst, is convicted for her role in the Symbionese Liberation Army's (SLA) 1974 robbery of a Hibernia Bank branch in the city's Sunset District (along the coast). She is sentenced to prison in September.

On May 24, the first daily installment of Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City column appears in the San Francisco Chronicle.

In July, California passes Senate Bill 95, decriminalizing the possession of marijuana, making possession of one ounce a misdemeanor punishable by a $100 fine.

The United States celebrates its bicentennial. The inspirational performance group Up with People performs the Super Bowl halftime show at Miami's Orange Bowl, proclaiming, “Some folks say we've come a long way. Others say we've got a long way to go. And you know, probably both are right.”
President Ford, hobbled by his connections to the Nixon administration, barely manages to win the Republican nomination over former actor and California governor Ronald Reagan.

Georgia Democrat Jimmy Carter defeats Ford on election day, becoming the first president from the Deep South since the Civil War.

Ice dancing makes its first appearance at the Winter Olympics.

Johnnie Taylor’s “Disco Lady,” off his album *Eargasm*, becomes the first-ever certified platinum single.

Teenage sensations Donny and Marie Osmond get their own television variety show.

Mayor George Moscone nominates Jim Jones of the People’s Temple to San Francisco’s Housing Authority. Jones, then a respected community leader, will be responsible for the mass death of 900 followers in Jonestown, Guyana, just two years later.

San Francisco bans roller-skating on public streets.

On November 25, music promoter Bill Graham presents The Band in “The Last Waltz” at the Winterland Ballroom in the Fillmore District. Guest stars including Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Van Morrison, Muddy Waters, and Ringo Starr all perform during the monumental farewell concert, which is filmed by Martin Scorsese.

Three nights later, Elvis Presley plays the Cow Palace in Daly City (immediately south of San Francisco), his last Bay Area show before his death the following year.

Popular films: *Rocky, Taxi Driver, Network*.

**1977**

The day after his January inauguration, Jimmy Carter pardons the vast majority of Vietnam draft dodgers.

In January, thousands protest the eviction of low-income San Francisco residents from the International Hotel at Kearny and Jackson.

Orange juice spokeswoman Anita Bryant begins her Save Our Children campaign in January, calling for the repeal of a Miami law that forbids discrimination against homosexuals. On June 7, 70 percent of Miami voters vote with Bryant to repeal the law, energizing the country’s religious conservatives. That night, hundreds of Castro residents, led by Harvey Milk, march through San Francisco in protest.
In March, City Hall installs metal detectors after a string of threats and bombings by SLA–like radical groups such as the Red Guerrilla Family and the New World Liberation Front.

Famed disco club Studio 54 opens in New York.

In June, State Senator John Briggs, a supporter of Bryant’s Save Our Children campaign, travels from his Orange County district to San Francisco to announce a new initiative: he plans to bar homosexuals from teaching in California’s schools.

Robert Hillsborough is stabbed 15 times in a Mission Street parking lot on the night of June 21. Hillsborough had gone out disco-dancing with Jerry Taylor; they were leaving a late-night burger joint when they were attacked by four young men screaming “faggots.” Mayor Moscone speaks out against John Briggs. Hillsborough’s mother publicly blames Bryant for the murder of her son.

On June 26, 250,000 people march in San Francisco for the fifth annual Gay Freedom Day (the forerunner of today’s Pride Parade)—twice as many as participated the year before. Marchers carry anti-Bryant protest signs and set up a memorial for Hillsborough on the steps of City Hall.

Good Vibrations, San Francisco’s first women-oriented, sex-positive sex shop (and only the second of its kind in the country), opens on Valencia Street.

Following a Moscone-led switch to district elections for city supervisors (who were previously elected at-large from a single slate), the 1977 municipal election reshapes the political landscape of San Francisco. For the first time, voters elect a Chinese American, an African American woman, a single mother, and an openly gay man—Castro leader Harvey Milk. Milk and Moscone will be assassinated by disgruntled ex-supervisor Dan White on November 28, 1978.

A GUIDE TO PEOPLE, PLACES, DRUGS, AND OTHER MISCELLANEA FOUND IN ARMISTEAD MAUPIN’S TALES OF THE CITY: A NEW MUSICAL

PLACES

GOLDEN GATE PARK
Dominating the geography of western San Francisco with its 1,017 acres, Golden Gate Park is more than three miles long and about half a mile wide. The park was designed by William Hammond Hall in 1870 in response to New York City’s Central Park (1858). According to the Encyclopedia of San Francisco, “At the turn of the [19th] century, Golden Gate Park was the free Disneyland of its time, with attractions ranging from animals and birds to lush plantings and numerous types of recreational and athletic activities.” Its most notable features include Kezar Stadium, home to the San Francisco 49ers from 1946 until 1970, the Conservatory of Flowers, the de Young Museum of fine art, and several man-made lakes. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the large, open spaces of the park were the sites of major rallies and protests.

28 BARBARY LANE
Barbary Lane, the fictitious address of Tales of the City’s Anna Madrigal and her eclectic band of tenants, is based on the real Macondray Lane, a quiet pedestrian passage on Russian Hill. (There is a number 27, but no 28.) Fodor’s calls it the “quintessential hidden garden . . . a quiet, cobbled pedestrian lane lined with Edwardian cottages and flowering plants and trees.” Maupin describes Barbary Lane as

Macondray Lane, 2010, by Lara Ramsay
One of the first places Armistead Maupin lived—“the first seriously permanent place”—was a little studio stuck on a rooftop on Russian Hill, like the one Norman inhabits in Tales of the City, in a block of Union St. between Hyde and Leavenworth. Originally, he called it “The Pent-shack,” but changed it, “so poetic was I, to ‘Little Cat Feet,’ for the Sandburg poem.” A couple blocks away is an elevated, tree-shaded path called Macondray Lane. “I stumbled on it one day on my way to the Savoy Tivoli or Dave’s Baths—or both—and was charmed by it,” he says. A few years later, he would transform Macondray Lane into Barbary Lane where, at number 28, Anna Madrigal takes in the members of her chosen family.

—Michael Paller

“a narrow, wooded walkway off Leavenworth between Union and Filbert”; Macondray Lane is actually on the other side of Union—between Union and Green Street.

RUSSIAN HILL
This neighborhood in the northeastern corner of San Francisco gets its name from seven mysterious cyrillic-inscribed gravestones found by gold rushers at the top of the hill. The Russian men buried there were never identified, and aside from a plaque marking the site of these graves, the neighborhood never retained any particularly Russian characteristics. With its steep hills and many pedestrian-only lanes, Russian Hill is quieter and more secluded than its similarly affluent neighbor Nob Hill. Some suggest that this seclusion is a source of the neighborhood’s slightly bohemian character, which can be traced back to the 1890s, when writer Ina Donna Coolbrith nurtured a thriving literary enclave in the area.

WINNEMUCCA AND BATTLE MOUNTAIN
Winnemucca is a small city in northern Nevada. At the time of the 1970 census, the population was 3,587 residents. The drive between San Francisco and Winnemucca is 385 miles along Highway 1-80 and would have taken about seven hours without stops, assuming a 55-mile-per-hour speed limit. Prostitution has been legal within the city of Winnemucca—but not outside the city in unincorporated parts of Humboldt County—since 1971.

Battle Mountain is another small town in northern Nevada, located 50 miles east of Winnemucca along Highway 1-80. Like Winnemucca, Battle Mountain started as a mining town. Prostitution is also legal in Battle Mountain.

MENDOCINO
Mendocino is a small town in northern California known for its stunning location on the Pacific Ocean. Mendocino is located 155 miles north of San Francisco, and the drive along
us-101 would have taken about three hours, assuming a 55-mile-per-hour speed limit. Mendocino is home to many charming bed-and-breakfast establishments.

JACK TAR HOTEL
The 400-room Jack Tar Hotel opened in 1960, occupying a full city block at the corner of Van Ness and Geary. With its distinctive boxlike structure and revolving rooftop sign, the hotel “was once an oasis of opulence and swank,” according to Justin Berton of the San Francisco Chronicle, but it was ridiculed by columnist Herb Caen and others for its “gawd-awful” modernist architecture and pink-and-turquoise color scheme. Berton adds: “In a city that loves to hate its buildings, perhaps no other structure burned so deeply into the civic consciousness.”

BARBARY COAST
In mid-1860s San Francisco, the stretch of Pacific Avenue from Stockton to Montgomery became known as the Barbary Coast. Notorious for its dance halls, gambling houses, and opium dens, the area gained its nickname from its perceived similarities to the Barbary Coast of Africa (the middle and western coastal regions of North Africa, so named because of Berber pirates that commonly attacked ships and coastal settlements there during the 16th century). New York Sun writer Will Irwin wrote in 1906: “The Barbary Coast was a loud bit of hell. No one knows who coined the name. The place was simply three blocks of solid dance halls, there for the delight of the sailors of the world.” Damage from the 1906 earthquake, combined with such government regulations as the 1913 Red-Light Abatement Act and the arrival of Prohibition in the 1920s, brought an end to the Barbary Coast. The boundaries of the neighborhood now fall within Chinatown, North Beach, Jackson Square, and the Financial District.

THE ENDUP
The EndUp is an infamous San Francisco nightclub that opened in 1973 at the corner of Sixth Street and Harrison. In the 1970s, The EndUp was open seven nights a week as
a gay disco and home to the Sunday Afternoon Wet Jockstrap Contest. Although The EndUp was not a leather bar, it fell along the “Miracle Mile,” a stretch of several nearby leather bars in the SoMa (South of Market) neighborhood. The EndUp was criticized in leather bar guides as being “too twinky and overly pressed” in comparison to its chaps-prefering neighbors.

THE CASTRO
The intersection of Castro and Market Streets near the center of San Francisco is the heart of the Castro neighborhood, widely considered to be a gay mecca. In the early half of the 20th century, the neighborhood, previously known as Eureka Valley, was predominantly Irish Catholic. Many of the Irish Catholic families started moving out to the suburbs in the 1950s, and gay men began buying the neighborhood’s affordable, charming Victorian homes. In the 1970s, the Castro exploded as a center of social and political activity for San Francisco’s gay community.

CLIFFS AT THE PALACE OF THE LEGION OF HONOR
The California Palace of the Legion of Honor, located in the northwest corner of San Francisco in the Richmond neighborhood, is an art museum completed in 1924 as a memorial to the California soldiers killed in World War I. The clifftop trail along San Francisco’s wildest and rockiest coast runs behind the museum, offering remarkable views of the city and the bay.

SEA CLIFF
Sea Cliff is an affluent neighborhood located in the northwest corner of San Francisco, boasting large homes, several celebrity residents, and dramatic views of the bay and the Golden Gate Bridge.

PEOPLE

PATTY HEARST
The granddaughter of publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst, Patty Hearst was kidnapped from her Berkeley apartment on February 4, 1974, by gunmen loyal to the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA)—a group of left-wing urban revolutionaries who demanded that Hearst’s family feed all the poor of California in exchange for her release. Some food was distributed, but the SLA was not satisfied. For two months, Hearst later claimed, she was kept blindfolded in a closet and abused. In April, the family began to
receive audiotapes in which Hearst proclaimed her support for the SLA’s cause. Then, on April 15, a security camera showed Hearst shouting and brandishing a machine gun during an SLA bank robbery in San Francisco’s Sunset District. In a final audiotape communiqué, Hearst called her family “pigs” and declared herself “a soldier of the people’s army.” She was on the run with the SLA for a year and a half, participating in occasional armed robberies, before she was arrested by the FBI in September 1975. Hearst’s trial, which took place in federal court in San Francisco in 1976, generated a national media frenzy not unlike that of the O.J. Simpson trial of the 1990s. Her lawyers argued that she suffered from “Stockholm syndrome,” a condition in which hostages come to sympathize with their captors. But the defense was relatively novel—the term had originated just two years earlier after a Swedish bank robbery—and Hearst was convicted. She was given 35 years in prison, but her sentence was commuted in 1979 and she was freed. In 2001, President Clinton officially pardoned her as one of his last acts in office.

**Charlie Manson**

Charles Manson was the leader of a notorious group that committed several murders in the summer of 1969. Manson, a charismatic career criminal, had moved to Berkeley in 1967. He developed a loyal following, made up in large part of young women who had recently left their homes or dropped out of school—a cadre that came to be known as the “Manson family.” In 1969, after a period of nomadic travel, the family relocated to a ranch in Los Angeles. Manson’s pronouncements to his commune became increasingly erratic; he was obsessed with the Beatles’ *White Album*, which he claimed to be a prediction of “Helter Skelter,” an apocalyptic race war that he named after one of the songs on the album. Impatient for Helter Skelter to arrive, in August 1969 Manson ordered the family to commit several gruesome murders, including the killing of pregnant actress Sharon Tate and four others at the home Tate shared with her husband, Roman Polanski, who was abroad at the time. To make their killings seem politically motivated, the family wrote such slogans as “rise” and “death to pigs” in their victims’ blood. The high-profile crimes went unsolved for several months, and the eventual trial of Manson and his followers, which lasted for more than a year, garnered heavy media attention. The Manson family’s links to hippie culture, drugs, and popular music made their name a national shorthand for the perceived dangers of the new youth culture that had arisen in the late 1960s.

**Dr. Joyce Brothers**

Joyce Brothers, a psychologist, shot to fame in 1955 when she became the second winner of the televised game show *The $64,000 Question*. Brothers parlayed her sudden prominence
into a lasting career. By the end of the decade, she had a nationally syndicated advice column and two network television programs: an afternoon talk show that counseled viewers about love, marriage, and parenting and a late-night broadcast that dealt with such risqué subjects as sexual intercourse, impotence, and menopause. Her work laid the foundation for today’s ubiquitous daytime talk shows—Brothers herself once claimed to have “invented media psychology.” Her television shows ran well into the 1970s, and her newspaper column is still published today.

**Tab Hunter**

Born Arthur Kelm, gay actor Tab Hunter became a leading Hollywood hunk and teen heartthrob in the 1950s. His first major role came at the age of 19 in the racy South Seas romance *Island of Desire* (1952), and he later starred in the film version of the musical *Damn Yankees!* (1958). At the peak of his popularity, his studio began to fabricate romances with female costars, including Natalie Wood, to make him more marketable to the mainstream public. To protect his career, Hunter (like Rock Hudson, from the same era) was forced to live a double life: in private, a gay man who had relationships with Anthony Perkins and other young actors; in public, a heterosexual sex symbol with so-called “squeal appeal,” who once received 62,000 valentines from female devotees in a single year. By the 1960s and ’70s, the still-handsome Hunter had settled into a series of self-satirizing television appearances, surfer movies, and spaghetti westerns.

**Donny and Marie**

Donny and Marie Osmond, a brother-and-sister duo from a devout Mormon family in Utah, rocketed to fame as teen stars in the early 1970s and—at the ages of 18 and 16, respectively—began hosting ABC’s *Donny & Marie* in January 1976. The weekly variety show began with an ice-skating number and featured the siblings’ own hits, “oldies” covers, comedy sketches, and a recurring duet called “A Little Bit Country, A Little Bit Rock ’n’ Roll.” The show was popular with young viewers for a time, but it soon became a victim of changing musical styles, particularly the rise of disco. The show was cancelled in 1979.

**Anita Bryant**

Before 1977, singer Anita Bryant was known as a former Miss Oklahoma, a regular on Bob Hope’s USO tours, and the singing television spokesperson for the Florida Citrus Commission: “A breakfast without orange juice,” ran her catchphrase, “is like a day without sunshine.” But in January of that year, after the Dade County Commission passed a law protecting the rights of homosexuals—against her vocal opposition—Bryant hit
the nation’s airwaves as a zealous crusader against gay rights. With her husband, Bryant formed an organization called Save Our Children, based on the argument that openly homosexual teachers might corrupt young students: “Homosexuals cannot reproduce,” she proclaimed at rallies, “so they must recruit.” She wrote in her memoir, *The Anita Bryant Story: The Survival of Our Nation’s Families and the Threat of Militant Homosexuality* (1977):

> Homosexuals are not a race. It is not a birthright to be homosexual. A lot of them are under the misconception they’ve been a homosexual all their lives. . . . A homosexual is not born, they are made. If they are a legitimate minority group, then so are nail-bitees, fat people, short people, whatever. The laws of the land have always been to protect the normal, not the abnormal.

Bryant’s campaign soon collected 65,000 signatures on a petition against the new ordinance—enough to force a June referendum. At the time, the *Miami Herald* wrote that the battle had “all the ingredients—from sex to religion to Anita Bryant bursting into the ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic’—for a national media spectacular.” The *Herald* was right.

After a heated and polarizing campaign (which included a widely broadcast television spot contrasting San Francisco’s Gay Freedom Day with the “wholesome” atmosphere of the Orange Bowl Parade), Miami voters sided with Bryant in a 70 percent result in favor
of repeal. San Francisco’s gay community led a lively response to Bryant’s campaign that included a boycott of Florida oranges; although the boycott’s effect on sales was negligible, the Citrus Commission stopped using Bryant as its spokeswoman because of negative publicity. When the results of the Miami vote were announced on June 7, hundreds of protesters streamed out of the Castro and into San Francisco’s streets, with local leader Harvey Milk at the head of the march. The community was energized by its organized response to the crisis—attendance at the 1977 Gay Freedom Parade was double that of the previous year, and many participants carried anti-Bryant placards. But there was little consolation in Miami, where a new antidiscrimination ordinance would not be passed until 1998.

**DRUGS**

**MARIJUANA**

The most commonly used illegal drug in the United States, marijuana comes from the hemp plant *cannabis sativa*, and its active ingredient is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, known as *THC*. Marijuana is usually smoked but can also be mixed in food to be consumed orally. Research has shown that *THC* acts on specific sites in the brain, known as cannabinoid receptors, which are concentrated in areas that affect pleasure, memory, cognition, sensory and time perception, and coordinated movement. In the 1950s, the U.S. Congress passed the Boggs Act and the Narcotics Control Act, which made first-time cannabis possession an offense requiring a minimum sentence of two to ten years and a fine of up to $20,000 dollars. In 1970, however, Congress repealed the mandatory sentencing laws. In July 1976, California passed Senate Bill 95, decriminalizing the possession of marijuana. The bill made possession of one ounce of marijuana a misdemeanor punishable by a $100 fine.

**QUAALUDES**

Quaaludes are synthetic, barbiturate-like central nervous system depressants, or “downers.” First synthesized in India in the 1950s, they were introduced into America in the 1960s and soon became a popular recreational drug, although they were made illegal in 1984. In prescribed doses, quaaludes promote relaxation, sleepiness, and sometimes a feeling of euphoria, properties that made them seem initially to be a useful sedative. In 1972, quaaludes were among the most prescribed sedatives in the United States. They were a popular drug of abuse during much of the 1970s, even though both the United States and Britain tightened control of their use and dispensation. “Luding out,” i.e., taking quaaludes with wine, became a popular college pastime.
**Mescaline**

A hallucinogenic drug (not unlike LSD) derived from the peyote cactus, mescaline has long been a part of certain Native American religious rituals. It was made illegal in the United States in 1970. Its effects include visual hallucinations, though they are less radical than those produced by LSD. In a mescaline-induced hallucination, one sees an intensification of real objects, rather than nonexistent objects that the hallucinator thinks are real.

**Poppers**

“Poppers” is a slang term for amyl nitrates that, when inhaled, induce a head rush and feelings of sexual arousal. They became ubiquitous in the gay male club and bathhouse scene of the 1970s. Poppers relax muscles, including the sphincter, making anal sex less painful and more pleasurable.

**Angel Dust**

Angel dust, also known as “PCP,” is a dissociative anesthetic that was developed in the 1950s as a surgical anesthetic. Its sedative and anesthetic effects are trancelike, and patients experience a feeling of being “out of body” and detached from their environment. Use of PCP in humans was discontinued in 1965, because it was found that patients often became agitated, delusional, and irrational while recovering from its anesthetic effects. PCP turns up on the illicit drug market in a variety of tablets, capsules, and colored powders. PCP can be snorted, smoked, injected, or swallowed and is most commonly sold as a powder or liquid and applied to a leafy material such as mint, parsley, oregano, tobacco, or marijuana.

**Miscellaneous**

“I hear they opened a coed bath on Valencia—Oui Magazine calls it ‘The World’s Cleanest Orgy.’”

Gay bathhouses have existed in San Francisco since the 1930s, at least. Coed bathhouses may not have had so long-lived a history, but they did exist. One was the Sutro Bath House on Folsom Street (not to be confused with the historic Sutro Baths, built at the end of the 19th century near the Cliff House). According to Drummer magazine in 1980: “Easily one of the most unusual places in the world, the Sutro Bathhouse is a coed establishment—that’s right, naked women in the showers with men. A private membership club, the Sutro is popular with South of Market’s bisexual and lesbian community as well as a number of gays who have a sense of adventure and a vision of what the sexual future will be. About a third of the clientele is female, the other two thirds being straight, bi, and gay men of about
equal proportions. For the gay man who digs getting it on with a ‘straight’ man, this place is paradise. Also, group scenes of mixed sexes are common and a turn-on to many gay men.”

Originally a French magazine akin to Playboy, Oui was bought by Hugh Heffner’s Playboy Enterprises in 1972 to compete with Penthouse. Oui featured more explicit nudity, and its articles dealt with the racier aspects of 1970s culture.

“i’m gonna get cute and so should you, ’cause ladies get in two-for-one at dance your ass off!”

Dance Your Ass Off was a popular disco in North Beach, located at 900 Columbus Avenue and Lombard Street. Among its regulars, when he was in town, was crusading left-wing journalist i. f. Stone. By the mid 1970s, San Francisco had one of the largest disco scenes, alongside New York (where disco originated) and Miami. Dance Your Ass Off was known as a predominantly straight disco.

“tennyson. you know. ‘eating the lotus day by day.’”

Lotus is a flowering aquatic plant that has special significance in the Buddhist, Hindu, and ancient Egyptian religions. The Egyptian blue lotus has mild psychoactive properties—when eaten or infused into wine, it induces a sense of calm and well-being.

The lotus enters Western literature when, in Homer’s Odyssey, Odysseus and his shipmates land on an island off the north coast of Africa populated by the Lotus-eaters. The
plant makes the wandering crew members forget their home. “The Lotos Eaters,” by celebrated 19th-century English poet Alfred Lord Tennyson, alludes to this Homeric passage. In Tales, Anna quotes from Stanza v of the Choric Song:

How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,
With half-shut eyes ever to seem
Falling asleep in a half-dream!
To dream and dream, like yonder amber light,
Which will not leave the myrrh-bush on the height;
To hear each other’s whisper’d speech;
Eating the Lotos day by day,
To watch the crisping ripples on the beach,
And tender curving lines of creamy spray;
To lend our hearts and spirits wholly
To the influence of mild-minded melancholy;
To muse and brood and live again in memory,
With those old faces of our infancy
Heap’d over with a mound of grass,
Two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass!

“A PANDEMONIUM OF PARROTS”
Wild-caught parrots (mostly red-masked parakeets) from South America were brought to San Francisco in the 1970s to be sold as pets (a legal enterprise until 1993). These noisy birds escaped from captivity (or were deliberately released) and gathered to form a flock in the northeastern part of the city, particularly in and around Telegraph Hill. They continue to be fed by adoring residents and eat the nuts, fruits, and berries of local flora.

“A PERFECT KINSEY SIX”
A biologist and professor of zoology and entomology, Dr. Alfred Kinsey developed the field of sexology and shook America with his non-normative findings about human sexuality. He is most famous, perhaps, for his scale of human sexuality, derived from extensive interviews with a wide sample (though some say not wide enough) of men and women, which he published in his 1948 book Sexual Behavior in the Human Male. The Kinsey scale categorizes sexuality using a seven-point system:

0 Exclusively heterosexual with no homosexual
1 Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual
2 Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual
3 Equally heterosexual and homosexual
4 Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual
5 Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual
6 Exclusively homosexual

Of his scale, Kinsey wrote: “Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. . . . The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects.”

“AND WHY DIDN’T YOU BRING HIM? I DREAD HAVING TO GO TO THE BATHS. I SO PREFER EATING IN.”

In the United States, gay men have been meeting for sex in bathhouses since the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In California, as in other states, all homosexual acts were illegal and considered “crimes against nature” until 1976. In an effort to evade arrest, gay men resorted to finding those little-known “cruise spots” around town where they could meet for sex without fear of repercussion. As the rapidly growing cities of the 20th century created more public places where men could be anonymous and intimate with each other, the number of these meeting places expanded. The list included public parks, alleys, YMCA facilities, public restrooms, train depots, balconies of movie theaters, cheap hotel rooms, bathhouses, and, in San Francisco, the docks. Exclusively gay bathhouses began to crop up in this country in the 1950s. They were still subject to vice raids, but police generally allowed them to operate because they were considered discreet “outlets for the vast homosexual life in the city.” Some accounts describe early gay bathhouses as oases of homosexual camaraderie and “places where it was safe to be gay.” Generally, patrons felt that they were more protected from blackmail and harm than in “straight” baths, and gay baths offered a much safer alternative to sex in public parks. In May 1954, the earliest-known guide to San Francisco’s gay bars and baths was printed and handed out at a meeting of the Mattachine Society, the Bay Area’s first homosexual organization. With the warning that it contained “Confidential and Unofficial” information, the mimeographed sheet listed Jack’s Baths, the Club Baths on Turk, the Palace Baths on Third Street, and the San Francisco Baths on Ellis.

In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, gay bathhouses evolved from discreet places talked about in hushed tones into modern, fully licensed establishments that operated openly to serve the needs and desires of the gay community. These new bathhouses were primarily gay owned and operated.
A factor in the evolution of California bathhouses was State Representative (and future San Francisco Mayor) Willie Brown’s “Consenting Adult Sex Bill,” which went into effect in January 1976. As a result, gay baths and the sex that took place in them became legal for the first time in California history. In January 1978, in an effort to test whether this new California law applied to bathhouses, San Francisco police officers raided the Liberty Baths on Post Street and arrested three patrons for “lewd conduct” in a public place, but the district attorney’s office soon dropped the charges against the three men. In a written statement, the DA’s office concluded, “There’s no question this was a private place.”

In the 1970s, many bathhouses installed “fantasy environments,” which recreated erotic situations that were illegal and dangerous outside the confines of the baths. Orgy rooms at the tubs encouraged group sex, while “glory holes” recreated public restrooms, and mazes took the place of bushes and undergrowth. Steam rooms and gyms were reminiscent of the cruisy ymca's, while video rooms recreated the balconies and back rows of movie theaters. Some bathhouses catered to specific tastes, such as s&m; these baths tended to be located in the area known as SoMa, or South of Market (where The EndUp is located).

“TOM OF FINLAND, PRAISED BE YOUR NAME—MAY EVERY MAN IN HEAVEN ALL LOOK JUST THE SAME.”

The artist Tom of Finland was born Touko Laaksonen in a small Finnish coastal town on May 8, 1920. In 1939 he went to study advertising at an art school in Helsinki, where, according to the Tom of Finland Foundation, he also discovered construction workers, sailors, and policemen, who became the subjects of the art he was creating for himself. In 1956, he sent some of his homoerotic work to an American muscle magazine, Physique Pictorial. Knowing the conservative nature of American culture, he signed them, simply, “Tom.” His first work appeared on the cover of the spring 1957 issue, credited to “Tom of Finland.” His homoerotic and erotic art (he didn’t limit his work to just men) became popular worldwide almost overnight. The first gallery exhibition of his work took place in Hamburg; his first American exhibition was in Los Angeles in 1978. Exhibitions in San Francisco and New York quickly followed.
“HE’S A HOMOSEXUAL . . . THEY HAVE THEM ON TV NOW.”
Considered the first balanced portrayal of homosexual characters on American television, the ABC Movie of the Week *That Certain Summer* was broadcast in November 1972. From the website of the Paley Center for Media:

The idea for a movie of the week involving a gay couple that was relatively well adjusted and as “audience friendly” as possible was proposed by the successful writing team of Richard Levinson and William Link, who were intrigued by the fact that a gay friend of theirs had sons from a marriage prior to him coming to terms with his homosexuality. From this premise they fashioned a script about a middle-aged divorcé [Hal Holbrook], living in San Francisco with his younger male lover [Martin Sheen], who must decide whether or not to be open about his lifestyle when his teenage son comes to visit. Despite Levinson and Link’s solid working relationship with NBC, the network had no intention of okaying a movie in which homosexuality was treated as a fact of life, one explored with sympathy and understanding. Fortunately, the executive in charge of ABC’s television-movie division, Barry Diller, was deeply moved by the script and quickly green-lighted the project. To placate nervous sponsors, dialogue was written for Holbrook to explain that some people think of homosexuality as “a sickness, that it’s something that has to be cured.” Amazingly, Standards & Practices tried to get the writers to remove Holbrook’s simple declaration to his son that he and his partner “love each other,” but Levinson and Link fought that battle and the line stayed in. *That Certain Summer* proved an unforgettable experience for gay viewers relieved to see a presentation about homosexuality that was not filled with condemnation or condescension.

By the mid ’70s, gay characters were beginning to make occasional appearances on network television—usually as bit parts in now-forgotten sitcoms.

“MARY ANN, LOOK AT THIS SHIT! FOR GOD’S SAKE, I COULD DO BETTER WITH A KELLY GIRL!”
Originally the name of a groundbreaking temporary employment service, “Kelly Girls” has become a generic term, describing all temporary workers, including those who are neither female nor employees of Kelly Services. In 1946, William Russell Kelly opened Russell Kelly Office Services in Detroit to provide inventory, calculating, typing, and copying services to local businesses. When his clients began to ask if Kelly’s employees could come to their places of business to work, Kelly was happy to oblige. He began to offer workers
who could fill in when needed in a variety of situations due to employee illness or vacations, busy seasons, or special projects. His hiring base was largely female, many of them housewives and students. The Kelly Girl became the perfect prefeminist icon of the working woman—brisk, efficient, and unthreatening. After all, she was not a woman but a girl, and only temporary, just filling in.

“HE’S LIKE ATTICUS FINCH AND BOO RADLEY, ALL IN ONE PERSON”
The reference is to Harper Lee’s 1960 novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Set in Alabama during the Great Depression, the book explores race relations through the lens of a six-year-old girl, Scout Finch, whose father, Atticus—a respected white lawyer—chooses to defend a black man who has been spuriously accused of raping a white woman. At the climax of the novel, Scout is attacked by the enraged father (and actual attacker) of the victim. She is rescued, however, by the mysterious recluse Boo Radley. In the Oscar-winning film adaptation of the novel (1962), Gregory Peck played Atticus Finch, while Robert Duvall made his big-screen debut as Boo Radley. From Harold Bloom’s introduction to *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

A widower, attorney, and father of two in his 50s, Atticus Finch is the undisputed hero of the book—the moral force of both the story and the town and the quintessence of a southern gentleman. Arthur “Boo” Radley is the shadow, the bogeyman, of the book. Boo only reveals himself at the end, though his presence provides much fodder for the children’s imagination. It is rumored that he stabbed his father in the leg with scissors, and since that episode, he has never set foot outside the Radley house. Nevertheless, he leaves the children presents in the hollow of a tree and saves their lives—proving his humanity and decency before vanishing for good.

“HELL, WHEN I FOUND THAT DOLLY SHE’D SUNK PLUMB TO THE BOTTOM. COULDN’T GO NO LOWER . . . MARY KAY LADY.”
Since its founding in 1963, Mary Kay Cosmetics has operated on a “direct-selling” business model, with women known as “beauty consultants” selling products on commission to their friends and acquaintances at “demonstration parties,” as well as door-to-door. Founder Mary Kay claimed that her company was a tool of empowerment for women: as a Mary Kay beauty consultant, “any woman could become just as successful as she wanted to be.” Anecdotal evidence suggests that most consultants do not make significant profits, however, and the company has been accused of running a pyramid scheme.
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION . . .


**TALES OF THE CITY ON DVD**


Storyboards for *Tales of the City* by scenic designer Douglas W. Schmidt