

Tour #1: In the Beginning... Aquatic Park and Russian Hill

The tour starts at the corner of Hyde and Beach streets at the western edge of Fisherman's Wharf. If taking the cable car, hop on to the Powell-Hyde cable car. When picking up the cable car at the corner of Powell and Market, generally every other cable car is the Powell-Hyde car. If possible, either sit or stand at the very front and on the right side of the car next to the front window. This position offers you the best vantage point to see some of the finest vistas from that cable car line. The cable car line ends at Tour #1's starting point: the corner of Hyde and Beach.

NOTE: This is one of the longer tours. If time only permits you to take one Tales tour, make this the tour. Tour #1 features many of the locales in the books as well as many of scenes in the first mini-series... ..not to mention you'll see both Barbary Lanes.

Most of the walking on this tour will be on fairly level or downhill. Although you will be climbing Russian Hill using the Powell-Hyde cable car, there are short stretches (two blocks or less) of uphill walking.

Minimum Time: 1 ½ Hours

Link to Google Map for this tour: [Tour #1: In the Beginning... \(Aquatic Park and Russian Hill\)](#)

To start: After the cable car stops, walk across Beach or Hyde to the...

The Buena Vista Bar, 2765 Hyde Street (southwest corner of Hyde and Beach; across the street from the Powell-Hyde cable car turntable)

Mary Ann Singleton was twenty-five years old when she saw San Francisco for the first time.



She came to the city alone for an eight-day vacation. On the fifth night, she drank three Irish coffees at the Buena Vista, realized that her Mood Ring was blue, and decided to phone her mother in Cleveland.

(Tales of the City/28 Barbary Lane, page 9)

During the call, Mary Ann asked her mother to call her boss, Mr. Lassiter, and tell him that she was not returning to work. To commemorate the 35th anniversary of

the launching of the serial “Tales of the City”, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reprinted the first installment of the original serial on [Sunday, May 22, 2011](#).

Faithful to *Tales of the City*, the opening scene of the “Tales of the City” miniseries was filmed at the Buena Vista (BV). The location of the pay phone *in the film* was just to the left of the BV’s front doors as you exit the bar. The pay phone Laura Linney used in the film to call her mother was fictitious. (Until recently, the BV’s *real* pay phone was located down the steps in the basement next to the men’s room.) Currently, there is a cash register next to the main entrance.



The Buena Vista is renowned for its Irish Coffee that was introduced to the United States at the BV as the result of a now infamous challenge on the evening of November 10, 1952, between Jack Koepler, the owner of the Buena Vista at the time, and Stanton Delaplane, an international travel writer. The challenge: to recreate the Gaelic coffee Delaplane had enjoyed at the Shannon airport in Ireland. Several attempts were made that night to recreate the coffee but none successfully recreated the unique coffee served at the airport. Koepler eventually flew to the airport and met with Joe Sheridan, who had reportedly invented the drink ten years earlier as a cook at the nearby Foynes seaplane base.

Koepler returned to San Francisco with the recipe and Joe Sheridan as well.

The BV’s world-famous Irish Coffee draws visitors throughout the year. The BV now serves up to 2,000 Irish Coffees a day! The summer tourist season often finds the BV crowded and loud. Locals tend to avoid the bar during the tourist season; however, it’s not unusual for a San Franciscan to come out on a cold rainy night in winter with some friends for an Irish Coffee or two.

When visiting the Buena Vista, sit at the right end of the main part of the bar. From there you’ll have a great seat for watching the bartender brew and blend order after order of the famed Coffee.

The Buena Vista has a gift shop adjacent on Hyde. The store sells a variety of gifts with the Buena Vista logo. For more about visiting the Buena Vista, visit its [website](#).

Exit the BV’s front doors and cross Beach Street toward the cable car turntable. After you cross Beach you enter...

Aquatic Park, bayside, north of Beach Street stretching between Hyde and Van Ness streets (at the western end of the Fisherman’s Wharf area)

The park was featured twice in the *Tales of the City*.



The first time was immediately after Mary Ann finished her call to her mother, she “*left the bar and walked through Aquatic Park to the bay. She stood there for several minutes in a chill wind, staring at the beacon [i.e., the lighthouse] on Alcatraz. She made a vow not to think about her mother for a while.*” (*Tales of the City*/28 Barbary Lane, page 11)

In the “Tales of the City” miniseries, after exiting the Buena Vista, Laura Linney crosses Beach toward the cable car turntable. The scene then cuts to her walking down the cement bleachers that face the Park’s lagoon. The section of the bleachers seen in the movie is on the right as you face them from the lagoon. You can see the Ghirardelli sign looming large behind Laura as she descends the bleachers.



Behind bleachers is the San Francisco Maritime Museum. It was built in 1939 as a bathhouse for the Aquatic Park. The Museum’s Art Deco design was intended to resemble the clean lines of an ocean liner. The Maritime Museum along with Aquatic Park, the Municipal (coming up next) and the Hyde Street Pier (with the various ships) make up the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. Remember the location of the Maritime Museum. It will be mentioned again shortly.

Walk through Aquatic Park and along the shore of the cove created by the Municipal Pier. Continue by walking along the Pier to its end. Looking back at Aquatic Park you have a great view Ghirardelli Square as well as the ships moored at the San Francisco Maritime National Historic Park/Hyde Street Pier. From this vantage point, you also have an obstructed view of the Gold Gate Bridge to the west, Marin County (including Sausalito) to the north as well as Alcatraz and Angel Island to the north and northwest.



The second time Aquatic Park appeared in *Tales of the City*, Michael and Jon watched *Young Frankenstein* at the Ghirardelli Cinema at Ghirardelli Square. Afterward, they walked through Aquatic Park to the Municipal Pier and down its length to the end. There, Michael began to spin a yarn for Jon. He told Jon about the time in the past

when he and a former partner had a pet monkey...which turned out to be gay!

Curious about how Maupin came up with the story of Michael and the monkey? He drew upon his own experience. When serving as a member of the US Navy's River Patrol Force in Viet Nam in 1969, he had a pet monkey named Assbreath. There is a photo of Armistead and Assbreath on page 28 of *Armistead Maupin* by Patrick Gale.

Not long after he moved to San Francisco, Armistead Maupin's former girlfriend came to San Francisco to visit him. They walked out to the end the pier – where you're standing now. Armistead started to hem and haw – struggling to tell her how happy he was. The woman's thoughts eagerly raced forward expecting him to propose to her. She wasn't fully prepared when he finally said that he was so happy because he was dating a lawyer. A male lawyer.

She wasted no time calling Armistead's mother the next day.

Retrace your steps along the Pier back to shore. Follow the sidewalk along the left side of Van Ness Avenue uphill to Beach. Turn left and walk one block along Beach to 900 Beach on your left.

San Francisco Maritime Museum, 900 Beach Street (at Polk and Beach)

Remember this location, it will be mentioned below in this tour.

The [San Francisco Maritime Museum](#) was built in 1939 as the Aquatic Park's bathhouse. The building was designed in the Streamline Moderne style hinting an ocean liner. The interior is decorated with stunning murals.



Cross Beach at Polk.

Ghirardelli Square, the city block bordered by Beach, Larkin, North Point, and Polk



Michael and Jon watched *Young Frankenstein* at the Ghirardelli Cinema which was located at Ghirardelli Square. The Cinema closed its doors in 1986.

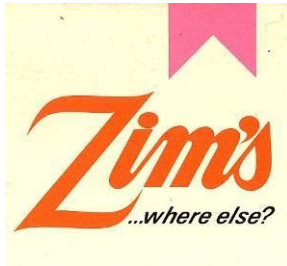
Ghirardelli Square was a large chocolate factory and woolen mill. It now houses shops and restaurants including Ghirardelli's ice cream parlor and store. Lines for the ice cream parlor can be long during the summer.

Street performers are often found by the fountain in the main courtyard.

Ghirardelli has relocated its chocolate making facilities across the Bay to San Leandro.

After you've explored Ghirardelli Square, return to Hyde and Beach.

685 Beach Street (southeast corner of Beach and Hyde)



This was the location of one of the many Zim's restaurants scattered across San Francisco and other parts of the Bay Area. It was the Zim's located here that Brian visited in *Tales of the City*.

At 5:00 am one morning, Brian suddenly woke up with a growling stomach. He hankered for a Zimburger. He raided his dirty laundry basket until he found clothes that would pass the sniff test and down the hill he went to Zim's. His waitress' name tag said 'CANDI COLMA'

"Zimburger OK?"

"Fine. Perfect"

"Anything else? Dessert, maybe?"

"Whatcha got to offer?"

"It's on the menu there, sugar."

He flopped the menu shut and gave her his best Huck Finn grin. "I bet it's not...sugar."

Moving closer to him, she tapped her pencil against her lower lip, cast her eyes left and right, and whispered, "I don't get off till seven o'clock."

Brian shrugged. "It's not when you get off, is it? It's how."

(Tales of the City/28 Barbary Lane, page 199)

When Candi finished her shift, she and Brian walked to her car which was parked next to the San Francisco Maritime Museum.

In the “Tales of the City” miniseries, Brian returns to the restaurant and invites Candi’s daughter, Cheryl, to accompany him to Mrs. Madrigal’s Christmas Eve party. In *Tales of the City*, the invitation and the ensuing exchange of insults was by telephone.



Zim’s is called Sam’s in the Tales of the City miniseries.

Zim’s was well known for its juicy hamburgers, nice greasy fries, and thick milkshakes made with real ice cream and milk. It was also known for its late-night service. The chain of restaurants was founded in the late 1940s by Art Zimmerman. The story goes that while fighting the Nazi’s during World War II, Zimmerman longed for two things: to get out of the war in one piece and to return to America to a juicy hamburger and luscious milkshake. His first restaurant was located on the northwest corner of Lombard and Steiner in Cow Hallow. Eventually, a chain of Zim’s coffee/hamburger joints spread across the city and to other parts of the Bay Area. Due to raising rent prices and other factors, one-by-one, the stores began to close. The last three closed in October 1997. Arthur Zimmerman passed away in 2008.

Walk east on Beach one block to Columbus Avenue. Just up Columbus on your left is the Hotel Caza.

Hotel Caza, 1300 Columbus Ave

This was the original building for the Holiday Inn – Fisherman’s Wharf which eventually covered two city blocks just south of Fisherman’s Wharf. Mary Ann stayed here during the first five days of her vacation in San Francisco.

In early March 1983, Simon Bardill, a handsome crew member of the Royal Yacht *Britannia*, jumped ship during Queen Elizabeth’s and Prince Phillip’s visit to San Francisco. Like Mary Ann seven years earlier, he spent his first few nights in San Francisco here at the Holiday Inn until he too eventually moved up Russian Hill to 28 Barbary Lane.



Holiday Inn still operates the second of the two buildings in the next block to the east of the building pictured here.

The tour next takes you up Russian Hill, so retrace your steps to the Powel-Hyde cable car turntable and ride the cable car up Russian Hill to Greenwich Street.

HINT: Sometimes, you can avoid waiting in the long line of people waiting to board the cable car at the turntable by walking uphill on Hyde one block to the corner of Hyde and North Pointe. There is a cable car stop at that intersection. The cable car conductor often doesn't fill a car completely at the turntable in order to accommodate passengers needing to board the cable car further along the line.

As the cable car climbs Hyde toward the top of Russian hill, be sure to ask the gripman or conductor to let you off at Greenwich Street, which is one block past Lombard Street.

Alice Marble Tennis Courts, 1200 Greenwich Street (northwest corner of Hyde and Greenwich)

When Mary Ann returned to San Francisco in the fall of 2008 (*Mary Ann in Autumn*), she walked around her old neighborhood on Russian Hill. After purchasing a sandwich at the Searchlight Market at the corner of Hyde and Union streets (see below in this tour), she walked up Hyde to the Alice Marble Tennis Courts to eat her sandwich.



The courts are named for Alice Marble (1913 – 1990), who grew up in San Francisco and was ranked the World No. 1 Tennis Champion in 1939. She won 18 Grand Slam championships in the late 1930s.



Her story doesn't stop with tennis.

For a brief time after she retired from tennis, she worked on the Editorial Advisory Board of DC Comics.

She married a WWII pilot who was shot down over Germany. Shortly before her husband was killed, she suffered a miscarriage as a result of an auto accident. In

1945, she was recruited to spy on a former lover, a Swiss national, who was a banker and Nazi sympathizer. A double agent shot her in the back but she was extracted from Switzerland and she recovered from her wounds. The story of her service was revealed after her death.

The above is just a snapshot of Alice Marble's exceedingly remarkable life. For more, read: "[Alice Marble, the Queen of Swat](#)". Her autobiography, *Courting Danger: My Adventures in World-Class Tennis, Golden Age Hollywood, and High-Stakes Spying*, is available through [Amazon](#).

If the courts are empty, walk through them for views of Cow Hollow, the Bay, and the Golden Gate. If the courts are full or if you want to stop and relax (possibly to eat a turkey sandwich), at their western edge and below the courts is Phoebe's Terrace. Walking along the terrace (both the paved and dirt sections) will reward you with nice views of that part of the City.

Return to the corner of Greenwich and Hyde, cross Hyde and walk east (downhill) on Greenwich.

1170-1176 Greenwich Street

Stand on the sidewalk immediately in front of this building and look east through the pines. You can see Coit Tower atop Telegraph Hill as well as part of the Bay Bridge off in the distance to the right. This view is seen in the first two Tales miniseries (*Tales of the City* and *More Tales of the City*). Remember: "Tales of the City" was filmed in the early 1990s and the photo you see here was taken in 2003...so the trees are larger now than they appeared in the miniseries and even in this photo.



The brief clip was used in both miniseries to transition between scenes.

Continue downhill on Greenwich.

1132-1134 Greenwich Street



This house has an interesting relationship to the Tales stories.

This is the house where San Francisco Police Commissioner Stewart McMillan (Rock Hudson) and his wife Sally (Susan Saint James) lived in the 70's TV show *McMillan and Wife*.

The TV show was mentioned twice in the Tales stories – both times by Mary Ann's mother. *Tales of the City* starts with...

Mary Ann Singleton was 25 years old when she saw San Francisco for the first time.

She came to the city alone for an eight-day vacation. On the fifth night, she drank three Irish coffees at the Buena Vista, realized that her Mood Ring was blue, and decided to phone her mother in Cleveland.

"Hi, Mom, it's me."

"Oh, darling. Your daddy and I were just talking about you. There was this crazy man on 'McMillan and Wife' who was strangling all these secretaries, and I just couldn't help thinking ..."

"Mom ..."

(Tales of the City/28 Barbary Lane, page 9)

The reference to *McMillan and Wife* did not make it to the opening scene of the "Tales of the City" miniseries. However, later on in "Tales of the City," Mary Ann's mother tried to frighten her into moving back to Cleveland citing a 'McMillan and Wife' episode to make a point:

Depressed about how her life in San Francisco seems to be falling flat, Mary Ann is contemplating moving back to Cleveland. In comes Michael carrying a roasted chicken followed by Mona. They try to convince her not to give up and move back to Ohio. The phone rings and Michael answers it saying, "*The boring residence of Mary Ann Singleton.*" Mary Ann lightly slaps Michael's hand and takes the phone away from him. It is Mary Ann's mother calling. Her mother asks for the name of the man who answered the phone. Mary Ann volunteers only Michael's first name. Pressed by her mother to give Michael's last name, Mary Ann states his last name doesn't matter. Alarmed with Mary Ann not knowing Michael's last name (an assumption), her mother recalls,

"Oh, I saw something like this on 'McMillan and Wife' just last week. A guy pretended to be a friend..."

There is a delightful quirk of fate about these references to "McMillan and Wife":

On Sunday evening, May 23, 1976, Armistead Maupin dined with a half-dozen men at Mama's at Gramercy Towers (see *Tour #6: Chinatown, Nob Hill, and the Edge of the Tenderloin*). Afterward, one of the men invited the group up to his suite of rooms (the Diplomatic Suite) at the Fairmont for a night cap. The man extending that invitation was Rock Hudson. Hudson already knew that the first installment of "Tales of the City" would appear in the next day's *San Francisco Chronicle*. He secretly purchased an early edition of the next day's paper. He entertained Maupin and the rest of the group by reading the column aloud (including the reference to his TV series *McMillan and Wife*), as Maupin put it: "rather drunkenly but with great charm".

Rock Hudson was a friend of Armistead Maupin. Maupin tapped into some events in their relationship for content in *Further Tales of the City*. Michael traveled with his buddy, Ned Lockwood, down to Los Angeles. Ned had been invited to spend the weekend with his former lover, the screen idol _____.

Armistead Maupin speaks of his relationship with Rock Hudson in HBO's *Rock Hudson: All that Heaven Allowed*

Retrace your steps up the hill to Hyde, cross over to the southwest corner of the intersection. Walk south (downhill) on Hyde almost two blocks. You are now virtually at "Ground Zero" for many of the locales mentioned in all of the Tales book.



2015-2020 Hyde Street, northwest corner of Hyde and Allen

The character of Connie Bradshaw was partially based on a friend of Armistead Maupin. His friend lived in this building.

Continue walking the short distance to the intersection of Hyde and Union streets.

Abrazo, 2000 Hyde Street (northeast corner of Hyde and Union streets)

Marcel et Henri was located here at the time of the *Tales* stories. The residents of Barbary Lane purchased some of their fancier meats here.

In *Tales of the City*, Michael purchased sausage from this charcuterie for Mona's breakfast one morning.

Also, in *Tales of the City*: on the evening she returned from her weekend tryst in Mendocino with Beauchamp, Mary Ann quick thawed with running water in the kitchen faucet pork chops she purchased at *Marcel et Henri*. She wondered if it was sacrilegious to use Shake 'n Bake on the meat.

In the "More Tales of the City" miniseries, DeDe tells Beauchamp that the sausages she's preparing for his breakfast are from *Marcel et Henri*.

Marcel et Henri produced French style sausages and *pâtés*. The business eventually relocated to South San Francisco. However, in April 2010, the owner and founder of *Marcel et Henri* passed away. A month later, a three-alarm fire struck its facilities and production ceased. *Pâtés* from *Marcel et Henri* had been available in many places throughout the United States.



The photo on the left is of *Zarzuela*, an excellent Spanish *tapas* restaurant that occupied this space until October 2018. *Zarzuela* replaced *Marcel et Henri* when it closed.

Searchlight Market, 1964 Hyde Street (southeast corner of Hyde and Union)

The Searchlight Market was first mentioned early in *Tales of the City* and it reappears in several of the sequels. The folks at 28 Barbary Lane frequently shopped at the Searchlight Market because of its convenient proximity to Barbary Lane.



Early in *Tales of the City*, Mary Ann called Connie from here to tell her she secured an apartment at 28 Barbary Lane.

Mona and Mother Mucca went there to buy munchies for the gathering at Mrs. Madrigal's when Mrs. Madrigal revealed her "story" to Mary Anne, Michael, and Burke (*More Tale of the City*). After landing a job as the hostess for the Bargain Matinee, Mary Ann became a minor television celebrity and found herself autographing her neighbors' grocery bags at the Searchlight Market (*Further Tales of the City*).

The Searchlight is mentioned at least three times in *Significant Others*. After marrying Mary Ann and moving to the Summit (below in this tour), Brian purchased Diet Pepsi, a box of Milky Way candy bars, and the new Colgate Pump toothpaste at the Searchlight. It was from the Searchlight that Thack called Michael to see about getting together – just as Michael is packing to spend the weekend at the Russian River with Brian. Later, after Thack left for the airport to return to Charleston, Michael felt a little down so he came to the Searchlight for milk and Oreos.

When Mary Ann returned to San Francisco in November 2008 (*Mary Ann in Autumn*), she walked around her old neighborhood on Russian Hill. She noticed that the Searchlight Market was still open. After walking around the neighborhood and reminiscing, she eventually returned to the Market and purchased a turkey sandwich. She ate her sandwich at the Alice Marble Tennis Courts at the crest of Russian Hill – which you just visited.

A note for those of you who are sticklers for detail: in the 1990 edition of *28 Barbary Lane*, there are two typos: First, the Searchlight Market is at one point erroneously called the Searchlight *Café*; second, Union Street is spelled as *Unicorn* the first time the Searchlight is mentioned in the book.

Armistead Maupin lived only a half-block up the hill (1138½ Union Street – see below in this tour) from The Searchlight – so shopping here was convenient for him as well.

Swensen's Ice Cream, 1999 Hyde Street (southwest corner of Hyde and Union)

Norman Williams bought Mary Ann ice cream here in *Tales of the City*.



Later, in *Babycakes*, after decking a mouthy coworker at Perry's (and getting fired for it), Brain walked briskly along Union Street back to Barbary Lane (see *Tour # 11: Union Street/Cow Hollow, The Marina District, and Back to the Beginning...*). He stopped outside of Swensen's to gather himself together before finishing his walk back home.

More than twenty-years later, when Mary Ann returned to San Francisco (*Mary Ann in Autumn*), she stopped at Swensen's and ordered a "Swiss Orange Chip" sugar cone.

From this very same corner shop atop Russian Hill, a world-wide chain of ice cream parlors was launched. Founded in 1948 by Earle Swensen, the shop quickly developed a reputation in San Francisco for providing quality ice cream at a reasonable price. Swensen's [website](#).

Walk south (downhill and away from the Fisherman's Wharf) on Hyde one-half block to Russell Alley, turn right and walk half-way down the narrow road.

"Jack Kerouac House", 29 Russell Street (tiny, short one-way street between Hyde and Eastman)

This was the home of Neal and Carolyn Cassady. Jack Kerouac lived with them for six months in 1952, while he wrote *On the Road*. Kerouac lived and wrote in their attic room.



When Mary Ann returned to San Francisco in 2008 (*Mary Ann in Autumn*), she walked around her old neighborhood on Russian Hill. After picking up a Swiss Orange Chip ice cream cone at Swenson's (see immediately above), Mary Ann strolled a short distance down Hyde and turned into this alley-like street and stood in front of this house. She recalled standing in front of this house with Brian years ago when they started dating. He told her this was Neal Cassidy's home. She recalled innocently asking Brian if Neal was one of David Cassidy's brothers.

Return to Hyde, turn right, and continue walking south (downhill) to Green. Cross to the southeast corner.

Studiopatro, 1898 Hyde Street (southeast corner of Hyde and Green streets)

One evening, Mary Ann ran into Michael as he was leaving his apartment dressed like Pan. He was headed to a party at the Green Plant Store which was located here at 1898 Hyde Street. It was replaced for several years by an architectural firm and it has recently become the home of store selling aprons, table lines, and other homegoods. If you look closely at the north facing clerestory window, you can see the word “flowers”.



In the book, *Tales of the City*, Michael walked to the store; however, in the “Tales of the City” miniseries, he rode a cable car with Mary Ann who was on her way to the Bay Area Crisis Switchboard.

Turn east on Green and walk uphill one block to the intersection of Green and Leavenworth.

Bellaire Tower, 1101 Green Street (southwest corner of Green and Leavenworth)

Brian called this the “Superman Building”. It was visible from the north windows of the “pentshack” at 28 Barbary Lane – Brian’s apartment at the start of *More Tales of the City*. Looking out the windows towards the Superman Building, Brian participated in the nightly voyeuristic trysts with the “Lady on Eleven” (who turned out to be Mona’s mother).



The “pentshack” atop 1138½ Union Street – one block away – where Armistead Maupin lived while writing the start of the “Tales of the City” serial in *The San Francisco Chronicle* (see below in this tour) can be seen from the upper floors of the Superman Building.

The phone number Brian gave to the Lady on Eleven (928-3117) was Armistead Maupin’s real phone number. The night before that episode appeared in *The Chronicle*, Armistead Maupin picked up cute, 19 year-old Daniel Katz. Early the next morning, while he entertained Daniel, Armistead’s phone began to ring.

Once [Daniel] realized what was going on, [he] got into it with a vengeance, answering the phone and hollering down the hall, ‘Hey Brain! Get down here. It’s another one for you...’ (Armistead Maupin, by Patrick Gale, p. 79)

Continue walking east one more block on Green to the southeast corner of Green and Jones. You’re now in front of...

The Summit, 999 Green Street (southeast corner of Green and Jones)

The Summit was first mentioned in *Tales of the City*. Prior to a tryst with Anna, Edgar Halcyon attended a cocktail party at the Summit with Frannie. During the tryst, Anna shared with Edgar the story about Atlantis. For more about this story, see *Transamerica Pyramid (Pyramid Center) in Tour #3: Jackson Square*.



The Summit was mentioned again in *Significant Others*. By that time, Mary Ann and Brian were married and living on the 23rd floor.

He lifted his gaze from the courtyard and surveyed their vista, a boundless sweep of city, bay and sky stretching from Mount Diablo to Angel Island and beyond.

(Significant Others/Back to Barbary Lane, page 268)

Pat Montandon, who was the inspiration for the Tales character, Prue Giroux, lived in the Summit's penthouse with her young son and ex-husband. She resided in the Summit starting in the late 1960's and into the 1970's. More below in this tour about Pat, her relationship to the Tales, and a horrifying time in her life.

Head south on Jones (that's uphill and away from the Bay). Half way up the block, stay to the left and walk up the sidewalk alongside the ramp to the corner of Jones and Vallejo. Turn left on Vallejo which eventually ends in a cul-de-sac. At the cul-de-sac, Vallejo continues downhill as a set of steps. Descend the steps to Taylor and cross over to Ina Coolbrith Park.

Ina Coolbrith Park and the Vallejo Steps

Ina Coolbrith was an interesting and highly beloved member of the San Francisco community. She was a poet, writer, and librarian. She eventually became the first poet laureate of California – the first poet laureate of any state. She also became the librarian for the Bohemian Club. This park was established in her honor near her former home here on Russian Hill



The park offers stunning views of North Beach, Downtown, and the Bay Bridge. If you know where to look, from the park you can see the roof of the parking garage/San Francisco Police Station where the “pentshack” was built for the



filming of the “Tales of the City” miniseries. In the photo above, the parking deck/police station is the light brown building just below the center of the photo. The steeple of a church located one block beyond the parking deck appears in the center of the photo, just above the parking deck/police station. You can visit the parking deck in *Tour #2: North Beach*.

This section of the Vallejo steps was seen in the “More Tales of the City” miniseries. Mona and Mrs. Madrigal descended these steps while Mona informed Mrs. Madrigal that Betty Ramsey was in town and wanted a meeting with Anna.

Retrace your route back uphill to Jones Street. Turn right and continue to retrace your steps to Green. Cross Green and continue walking downhill along the right sidewalk. If the pavement is wet, it might be safer to take the stepped part of the sidewalk. Halfway down the block and on the right, you encounter...

Macondray Lane (two blocks long, midway between Green and Union streets, running between Leavenworth Street on the west and Taylor Street on the east)



Although in the *Tales* books Barbary Lane is located where Havens Lane is (below in this tour), and at one time Armistead Maupin lived in a rooftop studio apartment (he called his own “pentshack”) that overlooked Havens, in various interviews and in the commentaries for the *Tales* miniseries’ DVDs, he repeatedly states that Macondray Lane was the true inspiration for Barbary Lane.

Macondray Lane (at Taylor Street) has the iconic wooden steps. (And like the wooden steps of Barbary Lane, from time-to-time, some of the boards on the Macondray steps needed replacing.) It also has the verdure of the mythical Barbary Lane.

It is not unusual to see fellow Barbaryphiles carrying a copy of *Tales of the City* slowly strolling down this lane hoping to run into Anna Madrigal and her children.

Ina Coolbrith, mentioned above on this tour, hosted her famous salon at 15 Macondray Lane.

Turn right/east onto Macondray Lane stepping through the vine covered arbor and walk one block to the end of the Lane and its wooden steps at Taylor.



Notice the abundance of flowers along the lane.

As you near the eastern end of the lane, take care walking on the old ballast stones that pave this end of the lane. Also, be cautious while walking down these steps during the spring and summer when vines tend to grow across them.

You may have noticed notice that the steps in the photos do not resemble the current steps. The City and County of San Francisco completed replaced the old steps a few years ago with the current – and much less rickety – steps.

The older wooden steps at Taylor Street are the wooden stairs used for Barbary Lane in all three of the miniseries. The new steps were also used for Barbary Lane in the recent Netflix series “Tales of the City.”

On the landing of the steps Mary Ann (Laura Linney) was introduced to Michael (Marcus D'Amico) by Mona (Chloe Webb) in the “Tales of the City” miniseries. Later in “Tales of the City”, Anna Madrigal (Olympia Dukakis) and Mona (Chloe Webb) climbed the stairs after an evening at Beach Blanket Babylon; Mona remarked it was inevitable that she lived at 28 Barbary Lane. In “More Tales of the City”, Jon (Billy Campbell) carried Michael (Paul Hopkins) up the steps when Jon brought Michael home from the hospital.



Visualize: It's Christmas Eve 1976, and Anna Madrigal is sitting on these steps after her clairvoyant realization that Edgar Halcyon (who has just passed away) will not be coming to her Christmas Eve party (*Tales of the City*).

Mary Ann returned to San Francisco in November 2008 (*Mary Ann in Autumn*). Before going to Michael's house in the Castro, she visited her old haunts on Russian Hill. From the foot of the steps, she could see Alcatraz. She could smell the moss on the steps beneath her feet. And after climbing the wooden steps of Barbary Lane, she caught the heel of one of her Ferragamos on the ballast stones.

In late Spring, 2016, the Macondray Lane steps were completely replaced. The design of the steps, however, was kept.

In *Michael Tolliver Lives*, Ben asked Michael to take him to Barbary Lane.

“There's nothing to see, sweetie. There must be three planks left from the old house.”

“I just wanna see the lane. It’s a perfect day for it, and I’ve never even climbed those steps.”

(Michael Tolliver Lives)

At the bottom of the steps, turn left and walk ½ block downhill on Taylor to the intersection of Union and Taylor.

Intersection of Union and Taylor Streets



Three scenes in “Tales of the City” were shot at this intersection.

When Mary Anne (Laura Linney) moved into 29 Barbary Lane near the start of the miniseries, she walked uphill on Taylor from this intersection on the west side of the street along the gray retaining wall toward the Macondray Steps.

In the “Tales of the City” miniseries, Michael and his parents walk uphill on the west side of Taylor Street *toward* this intersection. As they cross the intersection toward Barbary Lane (i.e., the Macondray Steps) – and stand where you are now at the southwest corner of the intersection – they encounter the roller-skating nuns. The nuns zip downhill on the opposite side of Taylor Street into the intersection where they turn left and skate uphill on Union Street.



At the same time as Michael and his parents continue hiking up the west side of the street toward Macondray Lane, Norman, Mary Ann, and Lexy, in Norman’s car, turn left onto Taylor Street and pass Michael and his parents. As they drive uphill, Lexy points out the adults wearing Halloween costumes (the band majorette, Joan Crawford, etc.) walking downhill on the eastside of Taylor Street.

In the book *Tales of the City*, Michael and his parents encountered the nuns two blocks west of here at the corner of Leavenworth and Union – which is the next stop on this tour.

This southwest corner of the intersection of Taylor and Union streets was also used in another scene in “Tales of the City”. Anna Madrigal and Mona walk uphill along the west side of the street after attending Beach Blanket Babylon (see *Tour #2: North Beach*). Anna shares how she “engineered” bringing Mona to Barbary Lane. The scene ends with Mona and Anna climbing the Barbary Steps.

Mona remarks to Anna that it was inevitable that Mona would end up at Barbary Lane.

“No.” Replied Anna. “Not inevitable. Just necessary.”

The next stop on the tour is two blocks away at Leavenworth and Union. Those are two very steep blocks. You have two options to reach the next stop: Walk or take a bus.

Walk: Simply head west/uphill on Union two blocks to Leavenworth.

Bus: Cross both Taylor and Union until you are at the bus stop at the northeast corner of the intersection. Then, catch either an outbound #41 – Union or #45 – Union-Stockton bus and take it two blocks to Leavenworth. The stop is at the northwest corner of the intersection.

Intersection of Union and Leavenworth Streets

During the day on Halloween, Michael and his parents walked up Leavenworth Street to pick up his parents’ rental car (an Aspen) which was parked on Union Street. Reaching the intersection, Michael’s mother exclaimed, “I’ve never seen a street like that in my life, Mikey!”

And then the nuns appeared. As they zipped downhill on Union toward Polk Street, one yelled at Michael, “Loved your jockey shorts!”

If not already at the northwest corner of Leavenworth and Union, cross over to that corner and continue walking west (downhill) a short distance on Union to 1136-1138 Union.

1138½ Union Street – The studio apartment atop 1136 – 1138 Union



Armistead Maupin lived in a small rooftop apartment (read: “Pentshack”) on the roof of this building (1138½ Union Street) for three years in the early 1970’s. He returned to this Pentshack for a while when he started writing “Tales of the City” for *The San Francisco Chronicle*. From that aerie, he could look down onto Havens Lane (coming up next on this tour).

Because Maupin’s former pentshack sits near the back of the building, it can’t be seen from Union Street. A glimpse of it can be seen from Leavenworth and from Havens Lane. A glimpse of it can also be seen for Havens Lane which is the next stop on this tour.



Armistead Maupin immortalized his Pentshack – as he called it – by using it as the model for the pentshack atop Mrs. Madrigal’s apartment house. Like Brian from the pentshack atop 28 Barbary Lane, Maupin had an unobstructed view of the “Superman Building” mention above in this tour. This photo of the “Superman Building” was taken from a south facing window of Maupin’s pentshack.



Armistead Maupin also called his Pentshack the “Little Cat Feet” taken from a line in a Carl Sandberg poem, “The fog comes in on little cat feet”.

Not long after “Tales of the City” caught on, Maupin moved from the Pentshack to the “Duck House” at 60 Alta Street on Telegraph Hill (see *Tour #4: Telegraph Hill and Back to Fisherman’s Wharf*).

The pentshack can be seen at the center top of the photo on the left. Although the pentshack is painted grey, it appears blue-grey in the photo. The pentshack can be seen if you stand on the left/east side of Leavenworth slightly uphill from Union.

Backtrack to the northwest corner of Union and Leavenworth streets. Turn left and start walking downhill (north) on Leavenworth. Halfway down the block on the left are the cement steps of Havens Lane. Climb the steps and walk along the tree-lined canyon until you come to 39 Havens on the left side of the Lane.

39 Havens Lane

“Welcome to 28 Barbary Lane.”

Although Armistead Maupin largely modeled Barbary Lane after Macondray Lane, Havens is where he actually located Barbary Lane in the *Tales* books. As mentioned just above in this tour, while writing the beginning of “Tales of the City” serial in *The Chronicle*, Maupin lived in a roof top studio looking down on Heavens Lane.



(If at this point you are too winded to do much else than pant, continue a few more steps towards the end of the lane where a bench is occasionally located on

the right. Sit there and read the rest of this. NOTE: Do not sit at the table and chairs at the very end of the lane. That is private property.)



39 Havens is *not* part of the tour. However, the yards to the right and left of this building are.

Armistead Maupin's former pentshack is located behind 39 Havens.

Face the gate for the yard to the left of 39 Havens and look at the top of the red brick building. You will catch a glimpse of the very top of Armistead

Maupin's former pentshack. It's grey. If you look carefully, you will be able to see the railing off the deck of the pentshack.

The photo on the right shows that same yard and gate from the deck of Maupin's former pentshack.

The photo below on the left is of the yard to the right of 39 Havens. Armistead Maupin could walk through this courtyard and climb the steps to his pentshack.

Visualize the gate to this courtyard covered by a small roof – the lychgate to Anna Madrigal's courtyard.

Please. Do not enter either yards. Both are on private property. Please respect the privacy of the building's residence. Thanks!



The set for 28 Barbary Lane used in all four of the miniseries was *not* based upon the descriptions of the apartment house found throughout the *Tales* stories. Rather, the set was modeled on an apartment house on Napier Lane (see *Tour #4: Telegraph Hill and Back to Fisherman's Wharf*).

Not only are the stairs in the apartment house in the miniseries external (below in this tour), the set for 28 Barbary Lane is painted white in the first two mini-series – matching an apartment house in Napier Lane – rather than brown as described in the *Tales* books. The set's color was corrected by the third miniseries.

In *Mary Ann in Autumn*, Armistead Maupin changed the location of the stairs. Rather than being located inside the building, the stairs were initially located on the exterior – reflecting the Barbary Lane set in the three miniseries. As Mary Ann stood outside her old home, she noticed that the outside stairways had been

moved or modified making the building now appear to be a single family dwelling.

The pentshack set in the first miniseries was built atop a building in North Beach that contains both a San Francisco police station and a city parking garage (see *Tour # 2: North Beach*). The pentshack in the second and third miniseries was built on a soundstage in Canada. The set for 28 Barbary Lane for the 2019 Netflix series was built inside a sound stage in New York.

Here are some specifics about 28 Barbary Lane from the *Tales* books:

- Mrs. Madrigal lived on the first floor. Mona and Michael shared the two-bedroom apartment on the second floor. Mary Ann's and Brian's apartments were on the third floor. Norman Williams lived in the pentshack on the roof of the apartment building.
- Eventually, the pentshack became the "TV Room" for the residents of Barbary Lane.
- After Brian and Mary Ann married and moved up to the Summit, Brian's 19-year old nephew, Jed, moved into their old 3rd floor apartment.
- From his 2nd floor apartment, Michael could see the neon fish on Alioto's restaurant at Fisherman's Wharf as well as the lighthouse on Alcatraz.
- After Michael and Thack moved into their own home overlooking the Castro, Polly Berendt, a lesbian who worked for Michael at Plant It Earth later moved into Michael's old 2nd floor apartment.
- The stairs were internal. The stairs to the pentshack were internal as well. (Which is also true for Maupin's pentshack at 1138 ½ Union.)
- The building's foyer was decorated with tarnished deco ladies and gilded mirrors. Its ceiling was pressed-tin covered with 1930's hieroglyphics.
- It had a courtyard that was entered via a lychgate.
- Looking south out of the pentshack windows Brian could see Lafayette Park, St Mary's Cathedral, the Mark Hopkins, and the Superman Building. Looking north out of the pentshack windows, one can see the lighthouse on Alcatraz.
- In *Significant Others* (set in 1984), Mrs. Madrigal lead a local – a very local – campaign to keep the wooden steps. The City of San Francisco intended to remove the wooden steps and replace them with reinforced concrete. On the day the wrecking crew was to arrive to start demolition of the steps, Mrs. Madrigal and Michael chained themselves to the steps in preparation for Mary Ann's arrival with a camera crew to film the protest. The steps at Havens have been concrete since at least the time when Maupin lived at 1138½ Union Street. Your tour guide does not know if Havens ever had wooden steps.
- In the early 1990's, Anna sold the building to a Hong Kong investor and she became just another tenant at 28 Barbary Lane. After a stroke, Anna could no longer manage the steps at Barbary Lane. She moved into a vacant apartment in Jake Greenleaf's building in the Dubose Triangle (*Michael Tolliver Lives*) – see *Tour #9: The Castro and Noe Valley*.

And finally, here's a bit of trivia regarding the production of the "More Tales of the City" miniseries: The nighttime skyline of San Francisco seen out of Brian's apartment in the pentshack is *not* San Francisco's skyline. It is the nearby city of Oakland's.

Return to the foot of the Havens steps at Leavenworth. Turn left and continue downhill to Filbert Street

Russian Hill's Steep Streets



As you walk through this tour, it should come as no surprise that Russian Hill has some of San Francisco's steepest streets.

The one block stretch of Filbert Street (on your left) from Hyde to where you are standing on Leavenworth ties for the steepest street in the City with a 31.5% grade. (This could explain why it's a one-way street only going downhill.)

Shortly before she left San Francisco for New York (*Sure of You*), Mary Ann took Shawna for chocolate shakes at Mel's Drive Inn. As part of their roller coaster of a route to Mel's they drove down this stretch of Leavenworth you are now descending.

Returning from the Russian River with Wren and Thack (*Significant Others*), Michael instructed Wren's limo driver to drive up nearby Jones Street – another extremely steep slope.

Continue walking downhill (north) to 2201 Leavenworth.

2201 Leavenworth Street (northwest corner of Leavenworth and Greenwich, near the Greenwich Steps)

This building was used as the exterior of Connie Bradshaw's apartment in the "Tales of the City" miniseries. Laura Linney is seen crossing Leavenworth, walking up the sidewalk, and climbing the steps to 2201 Leavenworth. If you look closely at the movie, the street sign for Lurmont Terrace can be seen behind Ms Linney as she crosses Leavenworth. (The suitcase she's pulling is empty. You can tell by the way she pulls and lifts it.)



In *Tales of the City*, Connie's apartment is located in the Cow Hollow area of San Francisco – on *Greenwich Street* (see *Tour #11: Union Street/Cow Hollow, The Marina District, and Back to the Beginning*).

Continue walking north (downhill) on Leavenworth to the foot of Lombard Street. Walk up the steps at the northwest corner (of Leavenworth and Lombard) to the first house on the right.

1000 Lombard Street (northwest corner of Lombard and Leavenworth streets)



This is the former home of Pat Montandon – the person cited in at least two sources – and Pat herself – as Armistead Maupin’s inspiration for the *Tales* character, Prue Giroux. She lived here on the second floor six room apartment in the mid-60s – prior to the time period of *Tales*.

Pat had a harrowing experience while living in the building. She shares her story in her book *The Intruders*. At the time, Pat had a daily program on KGO, the Bay Area’s ABC affiliate. Pat frequently hosted parties in her spacious apartment in this building. One evening she threw a theme party on astrology. She

inadvertently insulted a touchy, volatile tarot card reader at the party. Indignant, he left but not before he placed a hex on Pat’s home. “I lay a curse upon you and this house. I do not forget, and I do not forgive. Remember that!”

One misfortune followed another for Pat while living in the home including a fire during one party at which Senator Edward Kennedy was a guest. Pat eventually moved from this residence (up to the Summit’s Penthouse) and regained her life but not before there was one final tragedy.

Pat had moved up the Summit and Mary Lou Ward, a close friend of Pat’s, temporarily moved into Pat’s apartment in this building. On the morning of June 21, 1969, Pat was awakened by a phone call. There was a fire in Pat’s former apartment and the body of a woman was found. The door to the bedroom where Mary Lou’s body was found was locked from the inside. There was no smoke in Mary Lou’s lungs. And the cause of the fire was never determined.

[MisterSF](#) provides a short article about the mysterious death of Mary Lou Ward, Pat’s close friend. In her book, *The Intruders*, Pat Montandon provides the full story of the curse and Mary Lou Ward’s mysterious death.

Like Prue, Pat wrote a weekly column (for the *San Francisco Examiner*). She also conducted “rap sessions” at her society luncheons. Maupin partially based Mary Ann on Pat as well. Like Mary Ann, Pat had a daily show where she introduced classic movies. Pat’s show was billed as Pat’s Prize Movies.

There is an interesting coincidence between Pat and the characters in *Tales*: During the time period of *The Intruders*, Pat had a fan club. The co-founders were two teens named: Mary Ann and Michael.

For more about Pat and this home...[Haunted Bay](#)...and...[MisterSF](#).

In *Tales of the City*, the location of Prue's townhouse is given simply as Nob Hill.

One last comment regarding Pat and Prue: Although Pat provided the inspiration for the character of Prue, the two are *very* different in character and achievement. While Prue slowly became increasingly desperate in her career and personal life, Pat went on to organize children from around the world to work for world peace during the Cold War. She was eventually nominated for a Noble Peace Prize for her endeavors in this area.

A note about Lombard Street: The block of Lombard above Leavenworth is promoted as the crookedest street in San Francisco – some say the world. There is another street in San Francisco that rivals Lombard for this distinction: Vermont Street on Potrero Hill. Although Vermont has one less turn than Lombard, the hill is steeper and the turns sharper. Many San Franciscans don't know Vermont Street exists.



Walk downhill on Lombard one block to Jones.

900 Lombard Street (northwest corner of Lombard and Jones streets)



This is where Scotty, Jimmy Stewart's character in the Alfred Hitchcock thriller *Vertigo*, lived. The exterior of the house used in the movie, most notably the entry way. The interior scenes were shot in a set built on a sound stage; however, that set was designed to closely match the layout and the external features of this home. In March 2013, the owner of the house constructed a wall and a solid, metal gate that now blocks the doorway/entrance to the home. Prior to this construction, you would have been able to see the actual mailbox which Madeleine (Kim Novak) used to deliver a note to Scottie. The photo shows the exterior of the house prior to the construction of the privacy wall and gate.

Armistead Maupin is a fan of Alfred Hitchcock. He placed some of the events of *Tales of the City* in locales seen in *Vertigo* (such as the Palace of the Legion of Honor and Fort Point). During production of the "Tales of the City" miniseries, he learned that Alastair Reid, the Director of the first Tales miniseries, was also a Hitchcock fan. Elements of *Vertigo* found their way into the miniseries:

- The music and the opening shots in both movies are nearly identical (if not identical).

Tour #1: In the Beginning... Aquatic Park and Russian Hill

- Mary Ann sat front of a large painting of a woman holding a bouquet at the Palace of the Legion of Honor – as did Madeleine, Kim Novak’s character in *Vertigo*.
- Mary Ann revealed to Michael what really happened to Norman Neal Williams at Fort Point, the same place where Madeleine attempted her suicide.
- The Brocklebank Apartments were used in the first two *Tales* miniseries: Madeleine lived in that apartment building as did DeDe and Beauchamp Day (see *Tour #6: Chinatown, Nob Hill, and the Edge of the Tenderloin*).
- The shot of the interior staircase of the Bay Area Crises Hot Line is highly suggestive of the staircase leading to the top of the bell tower at Mission San Juan Bautista.
- A special camera effect was developed by Irmin Roberts, one of the cameramen in *Vertigo*, called the “dolly zoom” (this effect is also known by a number of other names including the “Vertigo zoom” and the “Vertigo effect”). This effect is achieved by moving the camera dolly one way and the camera’s zoom the opposite direction. This effect was very noticeable in *Vertigo* when Scottie climbed the stairs leading to the top of the bell tower at Mission San Juan Bautista. Alastair Reid did not use the dolly zoom effect either time the staircase in the Crisis Switchboard appeared in *Tales of the City*; however, the effect was used in the scene where Beauchamp and Peter Cipriani have drinks at the club prior to Beauchamp meeting up with the Halcyons at the opera.

Vertigo also found its way twice into *Michael Tolliver Lives*:

Michael had purchased a Prius that came with an on-board “concierge” that had a “female, elegant, and a little bossy” voice. Michael and Ben named the voice Carlotta after the Madeleine Elster/Carlotta Valdes character played by Kim Novak in *Vertigo*.

One day Michael and Anna Madrigal decided to meet Shawna at the café of the recently rebuilt de Young Museum in Golden Gate Park. They arrived at the museum before the meeting time in order to see the new structure. Anna suggested to Michael they climb the new museum’s tower. Michael again referenced *Vertigo*, “As Jimmy Stewart said to Kim Novak.” (*Michael Tolliver Lives*, p. 205)

Vertigo also played a less visible role in *More Tales of the City*. The real name of the woman who impersonated Madeleine Elster was Judy Barton (Kim Novak). When introducing herself to Mother Mucca at the San Francisco Greyhound Station, Mona Ramsey started to say her first name, but suddenly blurted out the name Judy.

Continue your walk 1½ blocks further downhill on Lombard to Columbus. Turn left on Columbus Avenue.

Cobb's Comedy Club, 901-915 Columbus Avenue (northwest corner of Columbus and Lombard)

This is the former location of Dance Your Ass Off.

The day she decided to abandon Cleveland and stay in San Francisco, Mary Ann moved in with Connie Bradshaw, a former high school classmate. To celebrate, Connie took Mary Ann dancing at Dance Your Ass Off. As soon as Connie vanished into the dance floor, the “lemon scented candle” man attempted his smarmy pick-up of Mary Ann. Mary Ann left the disco and took the #41-Union bus back to Connie’s.



This is the end of Tour #1.

Return to Powell and Market by taking the Mason/Powell cable car which stops here at Lombard and Columbus. You can also pick up the #30-Stockton bus along this stretch of Columbus as well.

You can go directly from this tour to Tour #2: North Beach. Take the Mason/Powell cable car back toward Market Street. Step off the cable car at Washington and Powell. The cable car gripman and/or conductor will generally call out this stop as “Chinatown”. At Powell, walk north (downhill) three blocks to Powell and Broadway – the starting point of Tour #2.

Updated: 12 July 2023