

# 41st Annual SPR International Meeting June 23-27, 2010

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**SPR•2010**  
Asilomar California

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## Asilomar Update

Most of you who are coming to the conference have registered for the meeting and completed your housing reservations. If you haven't yet done so, take a few minutes and do so now! There are still a few single and double rooms available at Asilomar but they will be gone soon (all the information needed for making reservations is available on the SPR website). As you make your travel plans remember that an early arrival on Wednesday is strongly recommended and it is most convenient to fly into the San Francisco or the San Jose airport. Shuttle bus transportation to and from Asilomar is available from those airports; advance reservations are advised and can be made using this link: <http://montereyairbus.hudsonltd.net/res?USERIDENTRY=SPRA&LOGON=GO>

With June rapidly approaching, I've received questions about dress/clothing and restaurant reservations. Asilomar, like most of California, is a very relaxed place and the style of dress is strictly casual. The weather in June can vary

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## Russian Hill: An Urban Walker's Paradise

By Len Horowitz

Asilomar, the site of this year's SPR meeting, is not far from San Francisco. And San Francisco, one of the most beloved cities in the United States, has earned this love through its heart-captivating charm, warm and welcoming spirit, and superb natural beauty. Sue and I live about 35 miles south of San Francisco, far enough away that the pull of "the City," many years ago, led us to purchase a pied-à-terre in San Francisco. We selected a small condominium in the Russian Hill neighborhood and have come to love the neighborhood. I thought I might use this opportunity to describe the Russian Hill area, as one small—but very personal—sample of reasons that we, like other locals, love San Francisco.



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## Conference Update...

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from foggy, breezy days (with temperatures in the 50s F.) to clear, sunny days with temperatures in the high 70s to low 80s. Your best bet is to bring layers of casual clothes. The Saturday BBQ banquet will continue outside around a large outdoor bonfire. Casual dress is also fine for the vast majority of restaurants. However, popular restaurants are not causal about simply walking in without reservations. So for those of you who are planning to enjoy some of our outstanding restaurants, I'd encourage you to make advance reservations.

This month's article by Local Organizing Committee member Len Horowitz focuses on the Russian Hill neighborhood of San Francisco. I hope some of you will have the opportunity to check it out while you're here and for those who can't, Len's description will give you a good feel of what you'll be missing.

George Silberschatz

## Russian Hill: An Urban Walker's Paradise

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The Fay-Berrigan garden

Russian Hill is located in the northeastern part of the City. A hop-skip-and-jump to the north puts you at Fisherman's Wharf, Ghirardelli Square, the Aquatic Park, and part of the San Francisco Bay. An easy walk to the east brings you to two other neighborhoods, Telegraph Hill and North Beach. An easy walk to the south brings you to the very ritzy and affluent district, Nob Hill. But Russian Hill, our district, is neither the liveliest nor the glitziest; it is serene, rich in landscape delights, and loaded with San Francisco history and charm. It is something of an urban walker's paradise—very pleasing gardens to admire, simple but warm architecture to enjoy, and friendly faces on the street to greet and be greeted by. All around, there is also a scenic body of water, an often blue sky, sailboats, and islands to relish.

Russian Hill is a hill, but when a stretch of hill gets too steep for comfort, the neighborhood thoughtfully provides steps or stairs, offering the walker a very ready excuse to pause and look (and rest). The hill itself has two summits, so the district is generally peaceful and quiet. Serene, I would say, except in two respects. One not-so-serene element is the cable car that runs along Hyde Street between Fisherman's Wharf (that direction leads to the water) and Market Street (the other direction leads to downtown). Along Hyde Street, one can hear the continual low hum of the underground cables as they move the cable cars along—a charming (and still much used) relic of the past. The second not-so-serene element is at the intersection of Hyde and Lombard Streets, one of the summits of Russian Hill. In 1922, the slope downward along Lombard Street (a 27% grade) was too arduous a descent (or climb) for cars, so the grade was reduced to 16 percent by constructing 8 "hairpin curves." This block of Lombard Street thus became "the crookedest street in the world". Houses along that block of Lombard Street are lovely, and their front gardens are abundant in well-kept hydrangeas and other flora. Picturesque pink brick steps make life pleasant for pedestrians on each side of the street. This section of Lombard Street draws 750,000 tourists a year in cars stacked up at the top, like skiers off a ski lift, ready for their turn to slalom. (Personally, I prefer to walk down the steps and contemplate views of the Bay and the landscape.)



Lombard Street

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## Russian Hill

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The name Russian Hill dates back to the Gold Rush era, when settlers discovered a small Russian cemetery at the summit. The bodies were believed to be those of Russian fur traders and sailors. Eventually the cemetery was removed, but the Russian Hill name remained. Before the days of cable cars (pre-1880), the trudge uphill discouraged people from residing in the area—and, unlike Nob Hill to the south, Russian Hill never became an “elite” or exclusive residential area. Instead, with the advent of cable cars, the area attracted artists, writers, and others who were more in search of aesthetic experiences from the landscape than status and prestige. Homes were—and still are—relatively simple, contrasting with the more elaborate Victorian houses in other parts of the city.



A number of famous American writers have lived in the area. They include Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Ambrose Bierce. Bierce was a clever writer/journalist who is known for his famous “dictionary” (containing definitions such as: “An acquaintance is a person whom we know well enough to borrow from, but not well enough to lend to” and “The brain is an apparatus with which we think we think.”). Another hero is Armistead Maupin, who, in the 1970s and 1980s, wrote a witty and charming series of novels entitled *Tales of the City* concerning the radical social (including sexual) changes that were occurring in San Francisco during those years. Much action in the novels occurred at the home of Anna Madrigal on “Barbary Lane,” an address generally taken to be Macondray Lane in Russian Hill, a lovely narrow street with trees, flowers, and ferns, accessible only by foot.



In 1871 the San Francisco Art Institute, the West’s oldest art school, was founded and located in Russian Hill. The present building (800 Chestnut Street) resembles a Spanish monastery built around a courtyard. It houses a famous mural by Diego Rivera, and it also has a café that is open to the public, serving “inexpensive food with a million-dollar view.” As the Art Institute flourished and required additional space, it acquired a set of cottages that are visible just outside our own living-room window (looking west toward the Golden Gate Bridge). These cottages were originally built after the 1906 earthquake and fire to house people whose homes had been destroyed. In later years, when the Art Institute acquired them, the grounds were tended and nurtured, as befits an attractive satellite of the Art Institute. More recently, however, the owner of the cottages (our former neighbor) hoped to



Mural by Diego Rivera

wreck the cottages and destroy the property in order to replace it with a profitable high-rise building. And wreck he did: Through a combination of neglect and abuse, the cottages became a neighborhood eyesore. Neighbors all around grew alarmed by the prospect of a drastic change in the character of Russian Hill. Happily, however, with remarkable diligence and clever strategy (Nancy Pelosi, after all, is our elected congresswoman in the House of Representatives), the neighbors secured “landmark status” for the cottages, leading the owner to abandon ship in a huff. Now the current owner plans to restore the original cottages. Bravo, and yes we can. . . such is the spirit of the Russian Hill neighborhood!

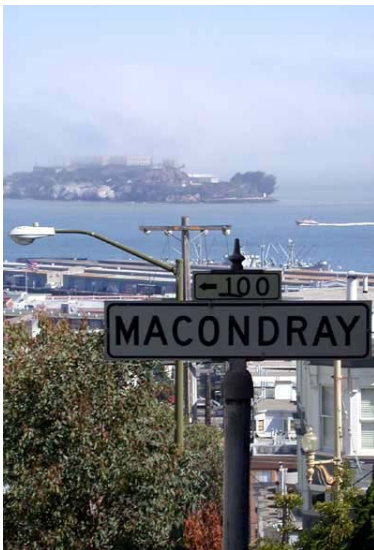
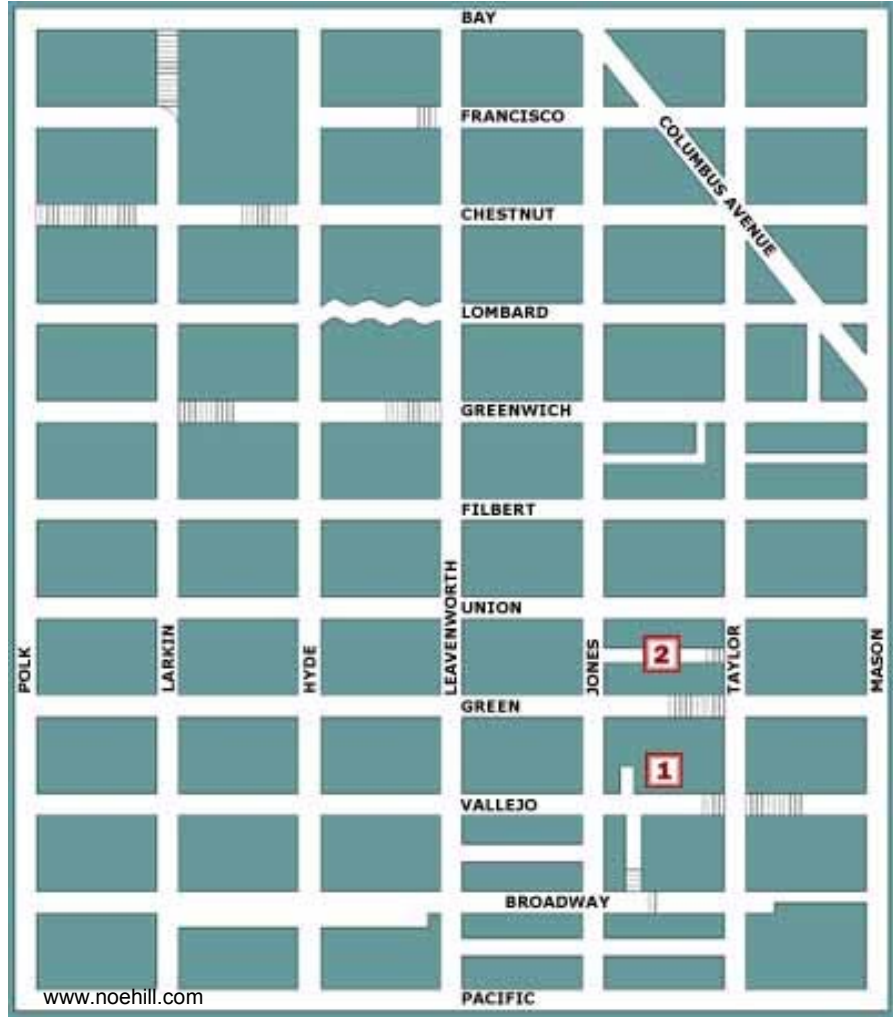
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# Russian Hill

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1. View of the Bay Bridge and the Transamerica Pyramid from the 1000 block of Vallejo Street.



2. Intersection of Macondray Lane and Jones Street

Macondray Lane is perched high above the San Francisco Bay with a view of Alcatraz Island and - when the fog rolls out - Angel Island and Marin County.

Macondray Lane was the model for Barbary Lane, the home of Mrs. Madrigal, Mary Anne and Mouse, in Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City* novels.