



**We've seen it** in SoMa, downtown L.A., and Brooklyn: An edgy hipster vibe combines with growing affluence and a burst of development to transform a raw urban landscape into the place to be. **And now?**

**It's**

# Oakland

■■■■ The lowdown on restaurants, politics, and



# 's turn

tate, and more in the Bay Area's next great scene

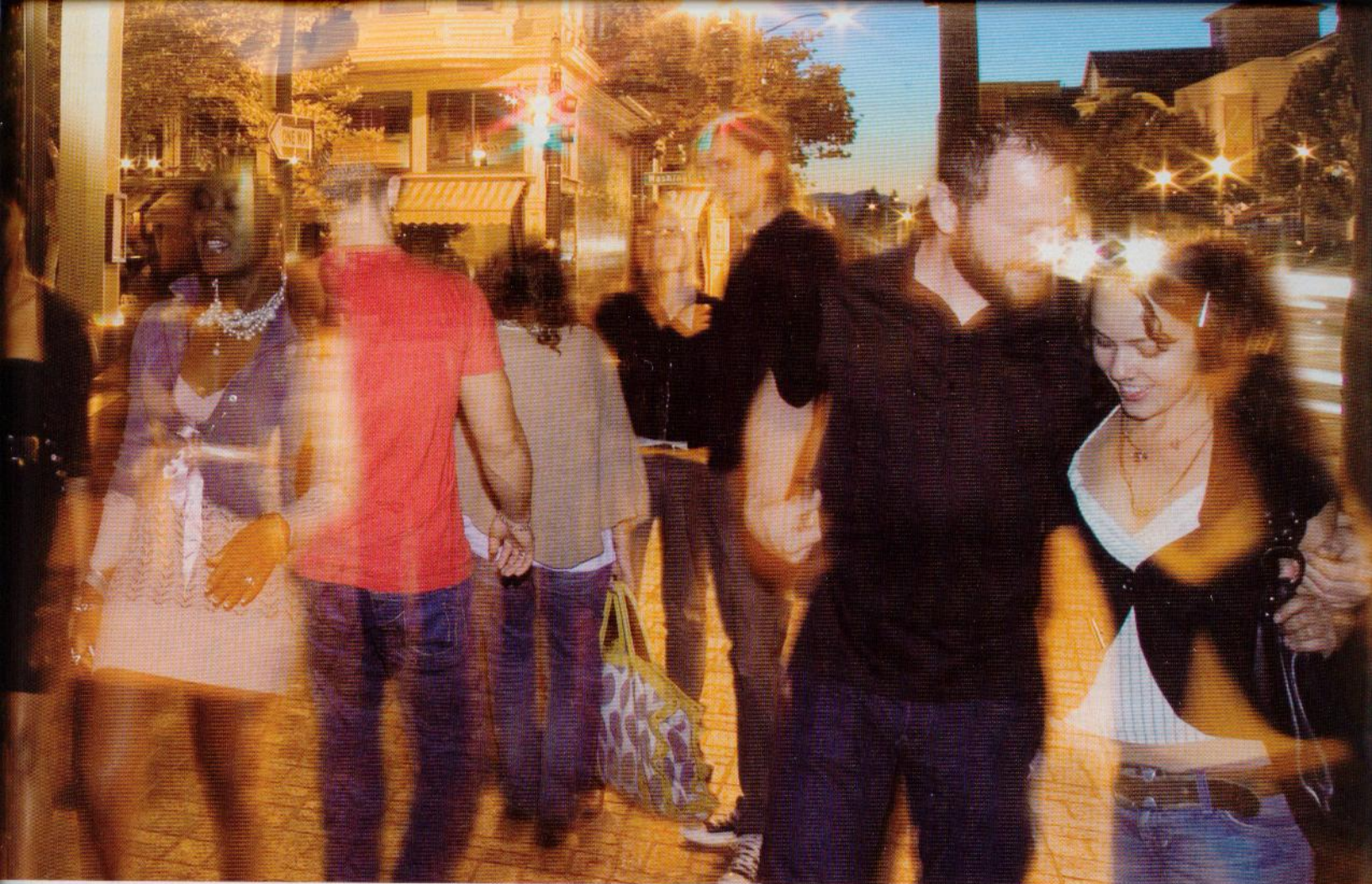
EDITED BY NAN WIENER | INTRODUCTION BY JAMES O'BRIEN  
PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMIE KRIPKE



**After I failed to find easy parking in Old Oakland for the second weekend in a row, the unfamiliar thought flashed through my mind: “All these damn bridge-and-tunnel types are starting to ruin this town.” I was only half joking. It was a Saturday evening,**

and B Restaurant was already rocking. No spaces on Washington Street. A new design gallery, Fiveten Studio, brainchild of the prolific Alfonso Dominguez (he co-owns the intimate Old Oakland restaurant Tamarindo), was having an opening around the corner. Some of the most beautiful people I'd ever seen in my adopted hometown were smiling brightly and sipping champagne outside the well-lit space. The entire block was closed off, anyway, so the city could show a free movie after sunset. No parking on Ninth, either.

At one point, I found myself cruising all the way down near Jack London Square. On Second Street, a dark-clad crowd of impossibly thin kids in their late teens and early 20s waited, like roosting crows with a bad tobacco habit, to get into the Oakland Metro Operahouse. I could hear the throbbing bass of a punk band checking its sound. I circled back, parked five blocks from my destination, and made my way to plush Levende East (sister of Levende Lounge in San Francisco), where the dinner crowd was an unself-conscious mixture of old and young, black and white, Asian and Latino—that's Oakland—but the air had an intriguing snootiness, or a whiff of it, that I hadn't encountered anywhere this far outside Rockridge. I love this city of 400,000 people, its very Ameri-



**B Restaurant** (far left), on the corner of Ninth and Washington, and **Levende East**, across the street (above, background), are two of the scene-setting new places turning downtown's Old Oakland into an all-day (and evening) people magnet.

can history, its polyglot populace, its industrial blocks and beautiful buildings and wild spaces, its aura of countercultural romance. But I've often felt it lacked any real urban buzz and a certain cosmopolitan instinct for self-promotion. So I took all this as a good sign.

These days, even important streets can still seem deserted when they ought to be humming—the lights go out early in semiurban Oakland—but more and more, the necessary elements of a metropolis are finding their way east. **Street by street, the city is coming into its urban own—one nightclub, art gallery, renovated building, shop, restaurant, and condo at a time.** As would-be San Francisco homeowners and businesses chafe at the cost of living and operating there, Oakland finds itself on a relentless drive toward a modern-day revitalization akin to what happened south of Market in the '90s, or the incursion of youthful hipness Brooklyn has seen in the past decade.

Signs of new energy are everywhere. With a half-dozen enormous condo projects nearing completion, Oakland's downtown is on the verge of hosting the kind of diverse, 24-7 life that animates every block and causes entrepreneurs to begin sniffing out opportunities. Restaurants and bars—some elegant, some noisy and rife with sexual

energy, some quiet and friendly—are already sprouting, like long-dormant bulbs that have finally gotten water. Art galleries are reinvigorating neglected spaces all over the city. Whole Foods is opening its first store in Oakland (Trader Joe's is readying two), and next to Lake Merritt, the most expensive cathedral in U.S. history unveils more of its compelling shape each day.

There are promising signs that no part of the city is being bypassed. Redevelopment projects are adding new life to the upper reaches of International Boulevard, while facade-improvement programs are raising profiles and pride in Fruitvale. Even in West Oakland, the once grand, now dilapidated 16th Street Train Station is slated for a commercial metamorphosis over the next three years, alongside three new housing developments—the first major private investment in the area in four decades. And while it's only a drawing now, the East Oakland no-man's-land around the Coliseum has been targeted for a redesign

## The hills are alive (with growing wealth)

NUMBER OF ZIP CODES WHERE AT LEAST ONE HOME SOLD FOR OVER \$3 MILLION LAST YEAR:

**Oakland: 8**  
(high: \$20 million)

**Berkeley: 1**  
(high: \$3.16 million)

## More for your money

COST PER SQUARE FOOT OF A HOME:

**Noe Valley: \$737**

**Rockridge/  
Upper Rockridge: \$528**

**Downtown Oakland: \$381**

14 highlights of a city on the move

# Where the new action is



**Central Station**  
An affordable mini-city planned for a West Oakland locale ignored since WWII.

**Auto Row**  
One proposal: Attract needed Westfield-like retail to this tired stretch.

**Piedmont Avenue**  
The growing mix of fine eats and boutiques feels trendy without trying.

**Grand Lake District**  
Timeless strips get a boost from a Trader Joe's and destination restaurant.

**Christ the Light cathedral**  
De Young-like architectural drama (down the block from the city's first Whole Foods).

**Uptown**  
Welcoming all coffeehouses, galleries, clubs—and now condos, too.

**Tower of Power**  
Awaiting the city's (and the market's) verdict: a plan for the city's tallest building.

**Old Oakland**  
Quaint, long-ago-rehabbed hood is developing real style and a pulse.

**2K of Jerry Brown's 10K**  
In a stark zone of civic buildings, up to 15 midrise complexes are on tap.

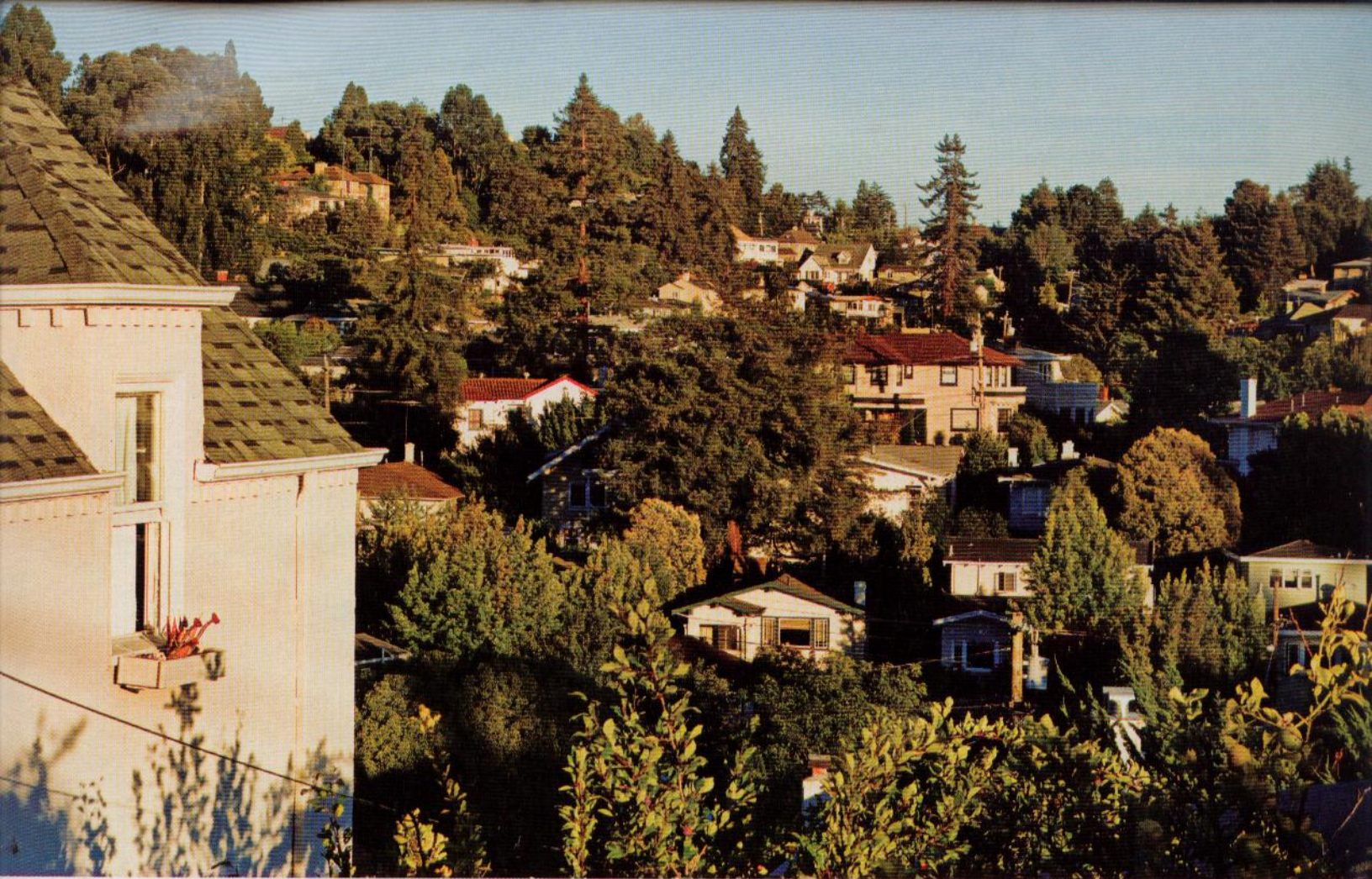
**Wayans Bros. Studio**  
The comic actors have vowed to build a 70-acre lot somewhere on port property.

**Produce District**  
Oakland's South Beach, a new waterfront hood with lofts and apartments.

**Oak to Ninth**  
A massive planned condo-land of over 5,000 that has waterfront advocates scared.

**Harvest Hall**  
Ferry Building-like food mecca at Jack London Square is currently stalled.





meant to brighten a blighted stretch of the city without denying its industrial character.

"Given its complexities and its problems," says Phil Tagami, a developer with deep roots here, who's currently revamping the Fox Theater, on Telegraph, "what Oakland is doing is amazing."

How has this happened? Partly, it's a matter of urban homesteaders unable to resist Oakland's beauty and soul—and its affordability—in spite of its well-known crime problems. Increasingly, you can spot their handsomely restored Victorian and Italianate houses dotting the streets of West Oakland.

Some credit forward-thinking companies like Essex, Signature, and Bridge Housing, which have been willing to take a risk—to bring luxury to Lake Merritt, for example, and commerce to long-neglected neighborhoods. Some say it all began with former mayor Jerry Brown's business-friendly Big Idea: 10,000 new souls living in the heart of the city. Still others credit the economy, stupid—Oakland, they say, is simply soaking up the benefits of the recent tech and real estate booms. "The national market was so incredibly hot," says Gregory Hunter, the head of redevelopment for the city, "that Oakland was due to get its share." Indeed, developers saw the high prices people were paying for houses and suddenly realized there was money here, too.

Together, Oakland's pioneers are slowly creating a pulse-lifting scene in the gritty, historic blocks that lie between the blandness of Jack London Square and the commercial ennui of Broadway Auto Row. If those two unfortunate projects represent Oakland's misguided recent past, Uptown—with its Forest City housing development and the impending return to glory of the Fox Theater—may well represent the city's brighter future.

Thomas Schnetz has a pretty good feel for these things. He led the way in Temescal, upper Telegraph Avenue's tree-lined culinary haven, by opening Doña Tomas eight years ago, and his new restaurant, Flora, is about to open in the renovated art deco Floral Depot Building in Uptown. "The Fox will become a landmark again, and all these restaurant people are moving down there," he says. "The neighborhood is just ready to pop."

Developer Andrew Brog is banking on it. He's bought three beautiful buildings in Uptown and Old Oakland, the other rapidly evolving neighborhood downtown. After failing in bids to acquire buildings in San Francisco, Brog made his first

Crocker Highlands (above) has some of Oakland's oldest, most beautiful, and priciest homes—and is a five-minute drive from both Lake Merritt and Grand Avenue.

## Singularly multi-culti

ETHNIC GROUPS

**African American: 31%**  
**Anglo: 26%**  
**Latino: 25%**  
**Asian American: 16%**

NUMBER OF DIALECTS AND LANGUAGES SPOKEN:

100

RANK AMONG CITIES IN ETHNIC DIVERSITY, BASED ON U.S. CENSUS CRITERIA:

1 (tied with Long Beach)

## Drama downtown

OPEN SINCE 2002

**New galleries: 22**  
**Clubs and bars: 8**  
**Restaurants and cafés: 40**

## Moths to a flame

The top hedge fund investor, real estate mogul, housing innovator, and builder in San Francisco are among the prominent people from across the bridge who know a good thing—or deal—when they see it.

### Tom Steyer and Kat Taylor

**SF BIOS:** One of the nation's top hedge investors (Farallon Capital) and his philanthropist/rock impresario wife.

**OVER IN OAKLAND:** They just put up \$22.5 million of their own dough to start the community-minded OneCalifornia Bank and are trying to persuade their many friends to make deposits—which will become loans to Oaklanders who want to start businesses, build affordable housing, or buy a home.

### Doug Shorenstein

**SF BIO:** The native San Franciscan and UC Berkeley grad took over his famous father Walter's commercial real estate firm in 1995.

**OVER IN OAKLAND:** He's bought or built five buildings downtown, including the last commercial high-rise to go up, 555 City Center, in 2002.

### John Fisher

**SF BIO:** Billionaire son of Gap founder Donald Fisher heads the family's philanthropy and investments.

**OVER IN OAKLAND:** He put his money behind the 2005 purchase of the Oakland A's for \$180 million. Now he and partner Lew Wolfe are moving the A's down 880 to Fremont.

### David Latina and Randi Gerson

**SF BIOS:** Housing pros and gay activists who raised the cash for the beautiful LGBT Center on Market.

**OVER IN OAKLAND:** They just cofounded one of the nation's first retirement homes for LGBT seniors, Barbary Lane Senior Communities, in the old Lake Merritt Hotel.

### Rick Holliday

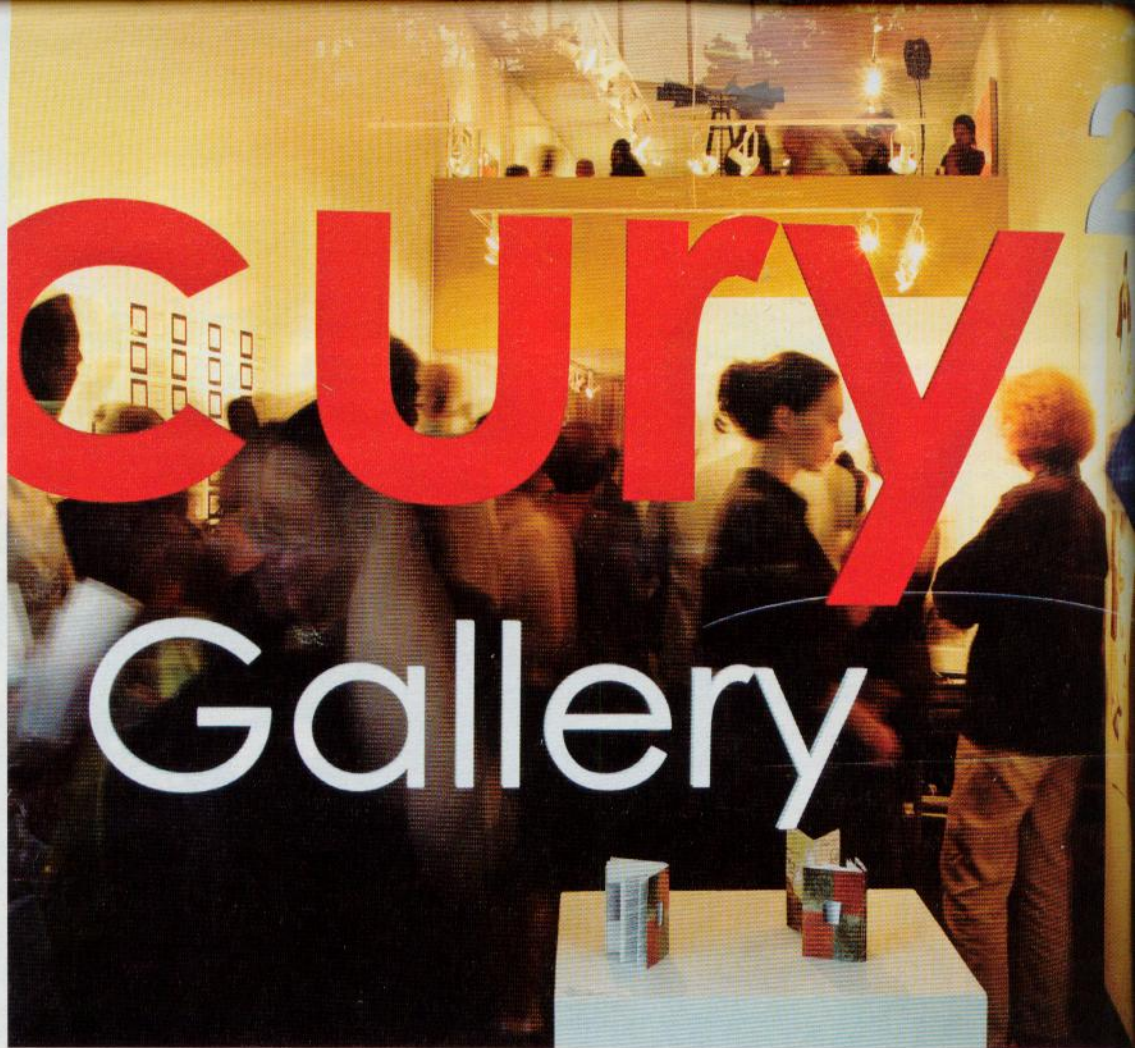
**SF BIO:** Affordable housing guru (with Bridge Housing) and developer of the city's first loft buildings in the 1980s.

**OVER IN OAKLAND:** He's helping to transform West Oakland's historic train station and surrounding land into a mini-city of residences and retail.

### Joe O'Donoghue

**SF BIO:** Major builder of lofts and apartments, ex-leader of the Residential Builders Association, and civic kamikaze who once told this magazine, "I measure the degree of my success by the number of enemies I incur."

**OVER IN OAKLAND:** He's consulting on the city's tallest (42 stories) tower proposed yet. In July, the initial public session about the sure-to-be-controversial high-rise on Lake Merritt prompted a typically theatrical O'Donoghue appearance.



# CURI Gallery

trip to Oakland in 2005, got off at the 12th Street BART station, and took the escalator up.

"I felt like I was back in New York City," says the East Coast native. **Parts of downtown reminded Brog of areas of Lower Manhattan—Chelsea and the East Twenties—where he'd done transformation projects, neighborhoods that are now some of the trendiest in the trendiest city in the world.** "There's not one bad neighborhood in Manhattan anymore," he says, "and the same thing can happen in Oakland." So in the Golden Bridge Lofts and the Marquee Lofts—each of which looks like it could have been airlifted here from SoHo—and inside the Gothic splendor of the flatiron Cathedral Building, Brog is laying the seeds of an upscale enclave like Oakland hasn't seen since these architectural gems were built, back in the early 20th century, when Oakland was roaring. Uptown, currently populated by dive bars and funky art galleries, may well transform into the kind of bright lights, big city strip that old-timers will lament 10 years from now, remembering the days in 2007 when it was still slightly dirty and too dimly lit. And still cool.

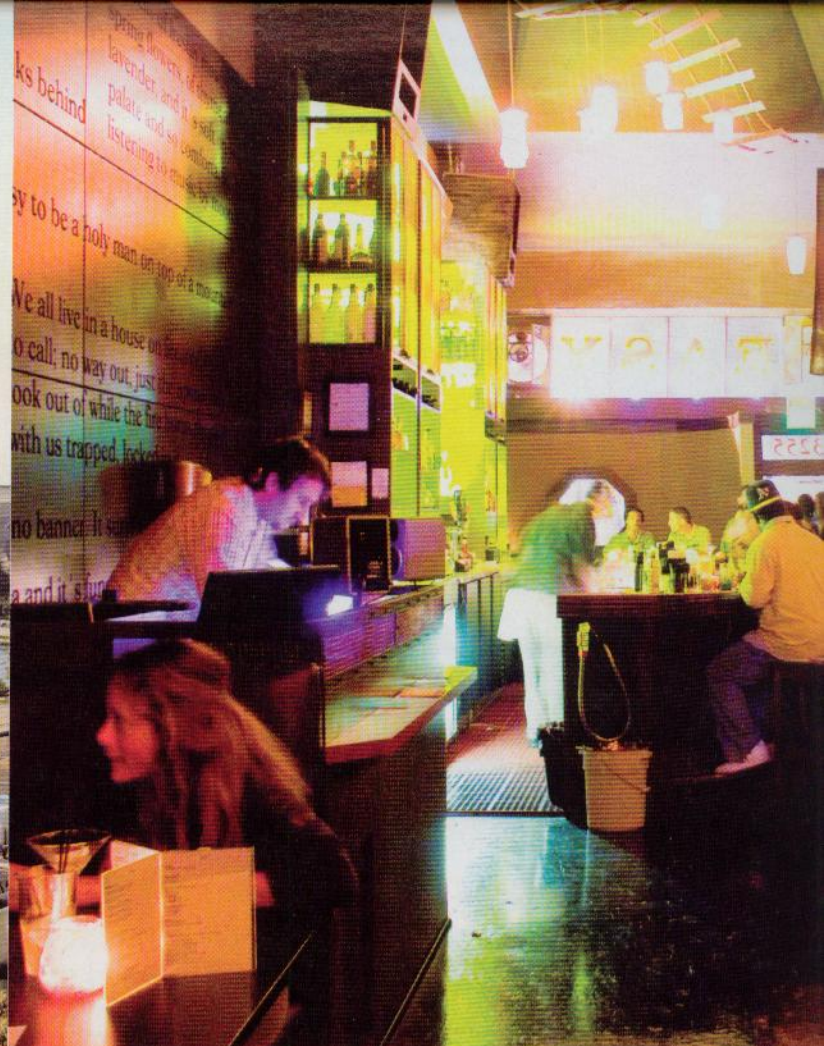
And it is just such a potential shift that makes me question my own breathless paean to Oakland's new excitement. It makes me wonder

where the city is headed, and who exactly will be raised up by all this flux.

So far, Oakland's makeover seems to be resisting the you-could-be-anywhere development that plagues many reborn cities across America. "We didn't believe the people of Oakland wanted that," says the owner of the Uptown Nightclub & Bar, Kevin Burns. "We don't need a high-end Denny's." Instead, what's happening here feels less like the mallification of mid-Market Street or (God forbid) downtown Walnut Creek and more like a discovery, as cool and new mix with cool and old in neighborhoods like Old Oakland and Temescal. In both these neighborhoods, new shops like Drift and restaurants like Pizzaiolo have reinvigorated old storefronts and old blocks, while attracting crowds that reflect Oakland's vibrant eclecticism.

But what happens when word gets out? Will I look up one day and see a Hard Rock Cafe or some other neon harbinger of generic doom? Will there come a moment five years from now when I hunger for the former unpretentiousness of Oakland and can't find it?

Other, more urgent worries persist as well. The city's historic inability to attract major retailers to downtown could strangle the life from its inde-



pendents. Certainly the whims of the real estate market could halt Oakland's progress, as could a seemingly detached mayoral administration.

So could the city's recurring violence. The brazen murder of journalist Chauncey Bailey brought national attention, but as we all know, here at home the papers are filled with such stories all the time. Sometimes late at night, from my house on a little hill in Glenview, I can hear the *pop pop pop* of death in the lowlands to the east, where old and young are being gunned down with a frequency no great city can bear. Despite the promise of new development, the powerless citizens of East and West Oakland could easily be left on the edge of this boom, waiting and hoping for something to trickle down from whatever prosperity it creates. Ten years from now, will the headlines still scream "Death in Oakland" while I squeeze through a crowd of white, well-dressed theatergoers exiting the gleaming, reborn Fox Theater?

Of course, change is nothing new in cities. When I ask Betty Marvin, the Oakland Planning Commission's history maven, if Oakland is on the verge of something big, she tells me they said the same thing in the newspapers as far back as the 1880s. To Marvin, today's boosters—some of

them, anyway—are just another era's Johnny-come-latelies bent on making a place that is already great conform to their own trendy, but possibly fleeting, vision of what a city should be.

I wholeheartedly agree with Marvin's basic message that Oakland is a wonderful place. But I embrace many of the changes I see. I like the new liveliness that straddles Broadway and Telegraph, even if parking is becoming a pain. I like the cranes that swing in the air. I like that there are people and businesses willing to embrace the uncertainty of it all. And I like that, so far, what's always been great about Oakland—its industry, its diversity, its coolness, its trees—has not been pushed aside by what's new about Oakland. It's as if the providers of urban amenities, and all the new arrivals pursuing them, have had the same simple epiphany that goes something like this: Ah, Oakland. Beautiful, soulful, raw. And stirring. ■

**JAMES O'BRIEN** IS A WRITER LIVING IN OAKLAND'S GLENVIEW DISTRICT AND A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR AT GO.

Mercury 20 (left) is one of many galleries that participate in Oakland's Art Murrur; Cathedral of Christ the Light (middle), by San Francisco architect Craig Hartman, slowly rises on Lake Merritt; Easy Lounge (right) is a quintessential example of downtown Oakland's relaxed bar scene.

## Foot traffic

POPULATION DOWNTOWN

**IN 2000: 11,000**

**IN 2008: 18,000** (est.)

once units under construction are inhabited

**IN 2015: 28,000** (est.)

if approved and planned units go forward

## Image problem?

PR STAFFERS

**San Jose: 26**

**Oakland: 3**



## Jerry Brown wasn't crazy.



As the mortgage market crashes through the floor and the nation sings a dirge about housing, ex-mayor Jerry Brown's outlandish fantasy of luring 10,000 new residents downtown is well under way, with 4,170 residential units completed or in construction since 1999, and almost 6,000 more in the pipeline. That's roughly the equivalent of dropping the Marina district into a neighborhood that's the same size and already has at least 11,000 people living there. The units aren't all filled yet (though some buildings sold out before construction was even finished), and the approved ones can't all be counted on to break ground. But with the Bay Area's projected growth—up to two million people from 2000 to 2020—warm bodies will eventually show up to occupy the new digs. Oakland's

entire downtown, formerly moribund after dark, is destined to become a lively, maybe even defiantly hip, place to live.

Since early in the decade, developers haven't been able to resist the combination of available bargains and the Brown administration's streamlined procedures for getting things built. First, lofts mushroomed near the estuary, and then the Essex **A** condo conversion shimmered over Lake Merritt. Big-bucks Signature's Broadway Grand **B** condos, their scaffolding unveiled this August, look pleasantly retro for a brand-new building. Eight Orchids **C**, a "postmodern European" condo development, recently popped up on the edge of low-rent Chinatown. **And the housing is by no means just for the rich. Working people—those who never caught the tail end of the real estate market in San Francisco—can actually afford to buy condos and townhouses here.** With prices starting in the \$200,000s and topping out above \$1 million, Oakland suddenly has a tremendous mix of new urban housing in the works, with some of the biggest projects yet to come.

Developers are even staking out parts of West and East Oakland previously considered far too risky a financial venture. But unlike the midcentury "renewal" of San Francisco's Fillmore district, no one is being displaced—the new development is happening on land that had long lain fallow. While any new urban growth generates protest against gentrification, many developers in Oakland have spent enough time getting to know the surrounding communities that the outcry is less fervent than usual.

When visionary developer Rick Holliday came up with the idea of renovating a cannery in West Oakland, now part of the Central Station project **D**—a whole new village in one of the Bay Area's

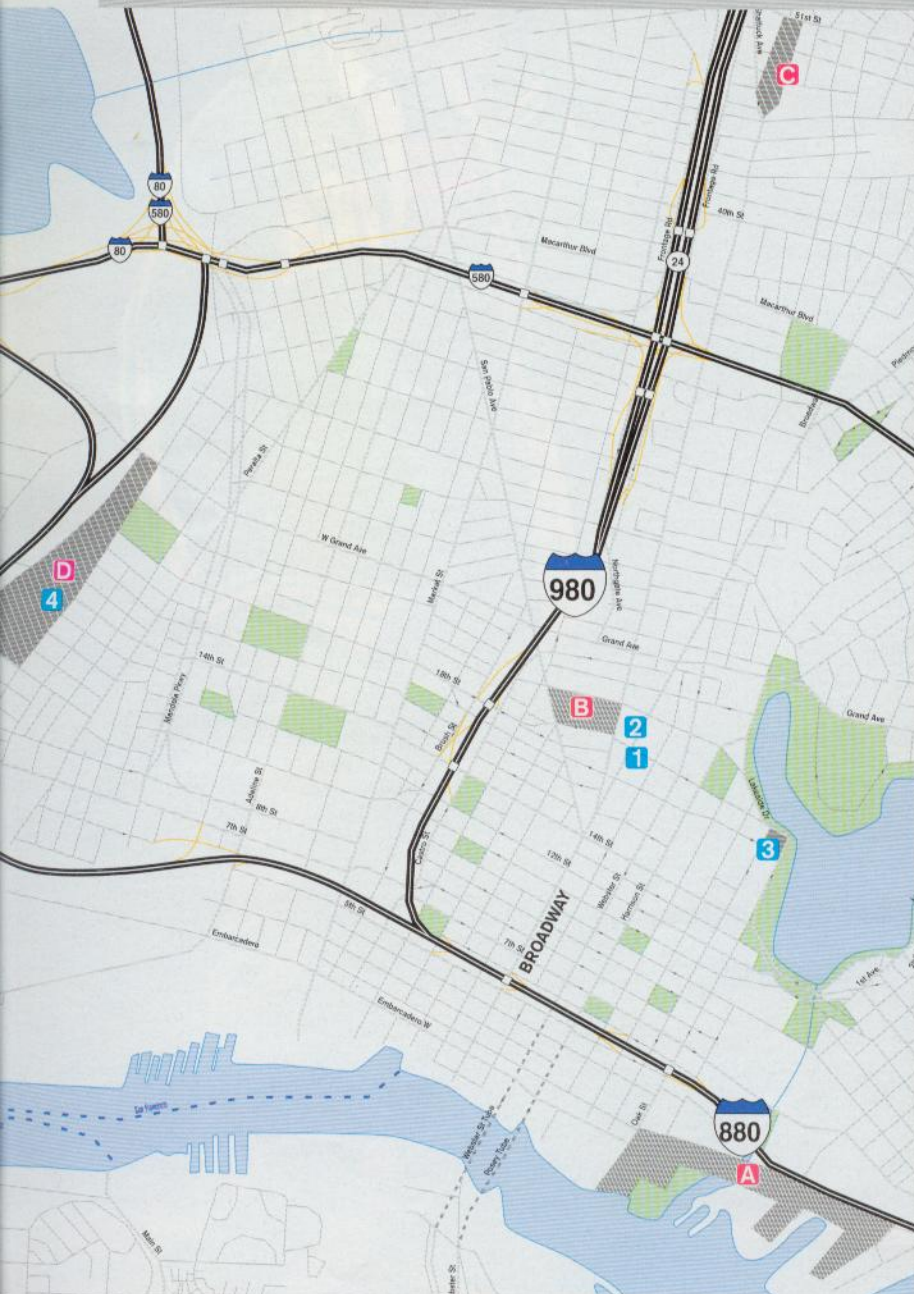
Developer Rick Holliday (left) and arts impresario-entrepreneur Marcel Diallo both have a vision for West Oakland that includes new housing, some of it affordable for current residents, as well as the elements of an African American cultural district. Behind Holliday rise his Cannery Lofts; behind Diallo is a mural depicting his hopes for the neighborhood.

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FOR TOWED TRAILERS  
PHONE 248-3021



# New kids on the blocks

Except for Uptown, which is subsidized by the city, these important development projects represent the first major unsubsidized private investment in Central Oakland's housing stock. Some of them, including Oak Knoll and Oak to Ninth, are still in the planning stages. Most are near BART stations, bus lines, or both—key components of smart growth.



**Oak Knoll** (NOT ON MAP)  
**Little city on the hill**

East of 580 in the hills and several miles from downtown, SunCal's project includes 960 market-rate units ranging from entry-level to estate homes, plus 82,000 square feet of retail. The stores matter to neighboring communities, whose residents currently have to hit the freeway to visit retail, but 50 acres of open space and the largest creek restoration in Oakland also make the development more appealing. Construction is set to begin next year.



**A Oak to Ninth**  
**Life on the waterfront**

This enormous project, by Signature Properties and Reynolds & Brown, will create a whole new community in a forlorn area along the long underused Oakland-Alameda estuary. It will include 3,100 flats, townhouses, and lofts priced at \$400,000 and up, plus 200,000 square feet of retail and commercial space and 30 acres of public open space. It's scheduled for completion by 2025.



**B Uptown Development Project**  
**Anchor of the entertainment district**

Near the city center, this project is divided into two phases. The first will take up four full city blocks with about 600 units of new housing—much of it designated "affordable"—framing a park. And it will bring 9,000 square feet of retail to the area by 2009. If phase two pans out (and there's some question about that), it will mean another 300 housing units and 20,000 square feet of retail.



**C Temescal**  
**Cool condos in North Oakland**

Developer Roy Alper has been quietly planning and building Mediterranean, Craftsman-style, and modern condos on the Temescal district's main drag—Telegraph Avenue—priced from the high \$200,000s to the high \$600,000s. While Temescal might seem an unlikely spot for condos, it makes sense by smart-growth standards: the district is served by buses and two BART stations, and its commercial strip grows more vibrant every year.



**D Central Station**  
**The city within a city**

This pioneering project sits next to 880, eight blocks from West Oakland's BART station. It will include a mix of market-rate housing (lofts now start at \$350,000, townhouses at \$451,000) and affordable rentals (\$400–1,000 a month). Also in the works are parks, retail space, and a potential rehab of the historic train station as a commercial center. Property taxes on the project should reap \$100 million over the next 20 years, much of which will go to improving this beleaguered part of town.

poorest communities—he began by visiting the barbershop and chatting with locals about the neighborhood. Over the years, he has engaged residents and community leaders in countless discussions, so he enjoyed support for the project before he ever broke ground.

“We wanted to make sure the black population wouldn’t be excluded,” says Marcel Diallo, a resident of a nearby pocket neighborhood, the Bottoms, who is creating a cultural district close to Central Station with a social club, a health-food store, and a gallery. He and others brainstormed with Holliday about creative financing strategies for neighborhood people who want to move in. “We’re all down here together,” Diallo says. “Local people plan to be some of the first buyers at Central Station.”

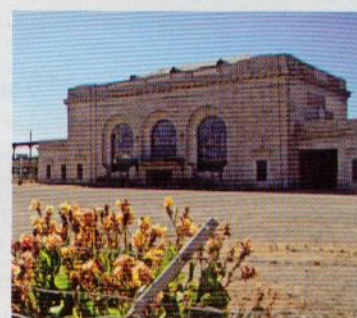
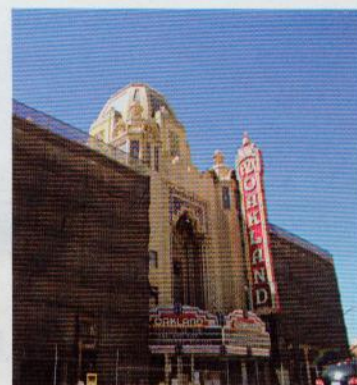
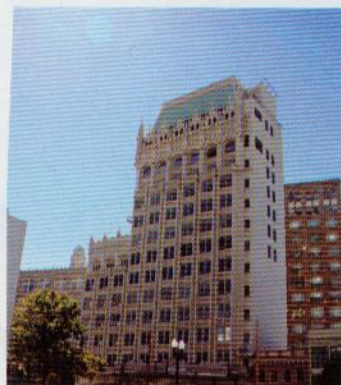
Much of the city’s revitalization is actually rehabilitation. “Oakland has benefited in that way from being the hole in the economic doughnut,” says Deborah Acosta, from the city’s business development department, meaning it’s been far enough behind the curve that no one rushed in during the tech boom to tear down the drop-dead-gorgeous old buildings now being renovated. So now you have high-quality office space in the magnificently restored Rotunda Building across Frank Ogawa Plaza from city hall, as well as condos under way in downtown’s most beautiful Gothic Revival building (see “Survivors!,” this page).

Of course, it’s a dicey thing to base a city revival on a housing boom. Booms can crash, go obnoxiously upscale if they succeed too well, or fall prey to politics. (Mayor Ron Dellums, for instance, reportedly thinks jobs, not housing, are the key at this point.) But with its juggernaut of new housing, Oakland is practicing the “smart growth” that makes sense to planners worldwide. Don’t force people out to the burbs; put the “doorknobs”—as some developers call them—where they don’t need a car. As a result, much of the new development is close to public transportation and commercial centers, with open space being planned to mitigate the density.

It’s already paying off. “I see a lot of people walking their dogs and riding their bikes downtown these days,” says John Dolby of Shorenstein, a major San Francisco-based office space developer, which several years ago put up the first privately financed office building Oakland had seen in 20 years. “That means they live near here. You didn’t used to see that much.” As those residents draw more business and amenities, Oakland will incrementally reap more property, business, and sales tax to fund city services.

Attracting retail, after all, was one of Brown’s original motivations. Oakland has a leakage problem: **the city’s retail specialist, Keira Williams, estimates the city loses \$1 billion every year in potential sales to malls and big-box stores in Emeryville and beyond, mostly for the kind of goods you can’t buy in quaint boutiques.** The theory ran that after the doorknobs arrived, big business would follow.

This hasn’t quite panned out yet, for reasons ranging from old buildings not being suitable for big retail to the image problem the city has been slow to shake. Still, the mood in Oakland is remarkably upbeat, as downtown starts to blossom without losing its history or soul. ■ PEGGY NAUTS



## Survivors!

Even with all the cranes swinging above the city, many of Oakland’s great old buildings are being reborn instead of replaced. Here are four historic local beauties in various states of renewal.

### 1 The Cathedral Building

1605 BROADWAY  
Named for its churchlike spires, this 14-story flatiron (top left) was the West Coast’s first Gothic “skyscraper” when it was built in 1914. It may be the most beautiful building in Oakland. Developer Andrew Brog bought it in 2005, and he’s in the process of converting the top seven floors into luxury condos for people looking for intense urban living at half the price they’d pay in San Francisco.

### 2 The Fox Oakland Theater

19TH ST. AND TELEGRAPH AVE.  
When the city of Oakland bought this 1928 Moorish movie palace (top right) in the mid-’90s, the building had been dark for 25 years. Developer Phil Tagami agreed to manage the restoration. Now, through a combination of municipal funding, historic preservation tax credits, and private fundraising, it’s being lovingly and painstakingly restored to all its exotic, escapist glory. Set to reopen in fall 2008, the Fox should be the centerpiece of the Uptown arts and entertainment district.

### 3 The Lake Merritt Hotel

1800 MADISON ST.  
Continually overshadowed—first by luxury hotels in San Francisco, then by the rise of auto travel and motels, and finally by the onset of chain suite hotels—this massive 1927 art deco structure (bottom left) with lake views may have found its raison d’être as the home of tasteful urban independent living for seniors in the LGBT community. It’s now called Barbary Lane, with Armistead Maupin as spokesman, and its new management group is redecorating and modernizing, but with a reverence for the building’s architectural history inside and out.

### 4 The 16th Street Train Station

16TH AND WOOD STS.  
With its 40-foot ceilings, grand windows, and 7,000-square-foot main hall, this once bustling beaux arts behemoth (bottom right) is just a palatial ruin now—but owner BUILD West Oakland, LLC, is reviewing proposals for the building’s rebirth over the next three years. It’s likely to become a performance or educational space, but one wonders: could it become Oakland’s version of the Ferry Building, if Harvest Hall (in Jack London Square) doesn’t pan out? Just a thought. JAMES O’BRIEN

## The Murmur has become a shout.

One way to assess the art scene in Oakland is by beer consumption. Not long ago, a small crowd of T-shirt-and-jeans locals would arrive at the occasional gallery opening and loiter all evening, doing more talking and drinking than art viewing. There's still some loitering and brown-bagging of bottles, but in the three years since a core group of about 10 galleries organized a monthly event known as the Oakland Art Murmur, the crowds have multiplied, the focus has shifted, and the amount of alcohol served has plummeted. "We see new faces every few minutes," says Art Murmur cofounder Mike Simpson, an artist and former owner of Boontling Gallery. "And we have difficulty finishing off a keg."

The Murmur has garnered attention in the press as an upstart addition to the Oakland art scene—but it's increasingly clear that it has now become the epicenter. For years, Oakland was the anticommercial antithesis of San Francisco. There were lots of underrecognized artists in the city, but no hub to bring them together, let alone together with patrons. In fact, Simpson recalls a time, not long ago, when collectors found artists largely through friends and acquaintances—hardly as reliable as the small fleet of minibuses run by the city of Oakland on First Fridays, delivering would-be patrons right to the doorsteps of galleries entirely free of charge.

Beginning at 7 p.m. on the first Friday of each month, the Murmur fills the Uptown streets around Telegraph and 23rd with an amiable mix of hipsters, hippies, and corporate types, who wander in and out of galleries looking at paintings inspired by graffiti and sculpture constructed from thrift-store detritus, work ranging in quality from museum-worthy to Dumpster-bound. The Murmur echoes San Francisco's wildly successful First Thursdays around Union Square, but Oakland being Oakland, with its lower rents and greater spontaneity, it's more like an urban block party.

"Most months, an impromptu street fair happens, with drum circles and a bake sale," explains Rowan Morrison Gallery co-owner Pete Glover.

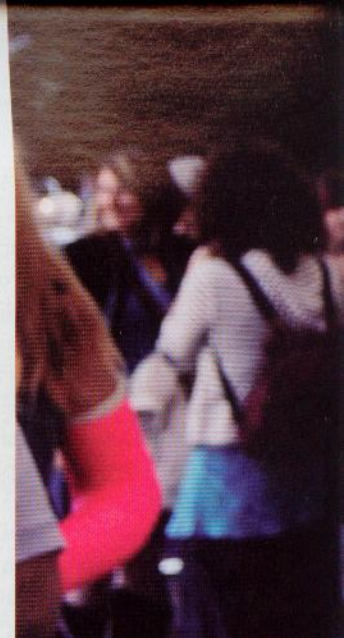
Hundreds, if not thousands, of people show up. Robert Tomlinson, co-owner of the cooperative gallery Mercury 20, estimates that his gallery draws 90 percent of its audience on the first Friday of the month, and he's even seeing more people over 40—what? no tattoos?—who have not only the curiosity to look, but also the financial wherewithal to buy.

**This new interest of people with real income has prompted galleries of all types to throw up a neon sign, or at least some vinyl lettering.** The range is from nontraditional spaces like 21 Grand to well-funded commercial ones such as Esteban Sabar Gallery. Even bars like Luka's Taproom and coffee shops like Mama Buzz are eager to allot wall space to neighborhood painters—often very fine work—because the art draws customers.

And the scene feeds on itself. "Galleries are one of the few businesses that benefit from having more around," Glover says, a phenomenon from which he has benefited as a gallerist *and* as an artist, an increasingly common hybrid in Oakland. (Glover's studio and home are in the same building as his gallery.) Such close-knit arrangements are also good for the neighborhood. The streets are safer, and other small businesses, such as the design boutique Industrielle, can attract a clientele of more affluent locals.

"Galleries serve as ambassadors for the city," says Kerri Johnson of the gallery Blank Space. "Artists and collectors are emailing from all over the world, wanting to find out more about the Oakland art scene. For so long, people would google 'Oakland,' and bad things would always come up. Now, good things are starting to come up instead." ■ JONATHON KEATS

At Mama Buzz Café (below), patrons view a photo by Julie Plasencia that's part of a series called "Chester Street" about gentrification in West Oakland. Mama Buzz joins the Art Murmur each month, along with Johansson Projects gallery (above).



# projects



## Get off the bus for...

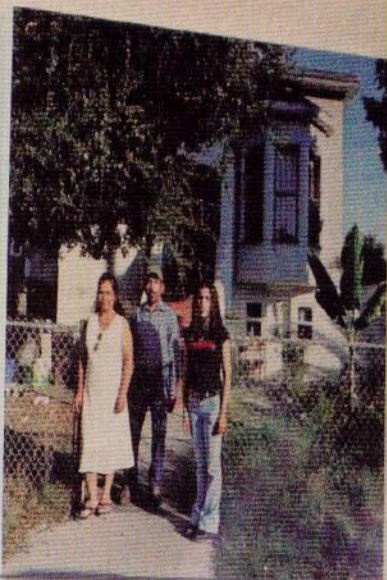
**A** Run by an artist couple who live upstairs and keep a studio next door, **Rowan Morrison** gives emerging painters and photographers, mostly from Oakland, comprehensive solo shows that allow collectors to see the art in-depth, a treatment more often awarded to artists midcareer. The gallery also sells affordable art books and prints. 330 40TH ST., 510-384-5344, ROWANMORRISON.COM.

**B** **Mercury 20** is a collective exhibition space owned and run by 20 East Bay artists who show their work in rotating two-person shows. The art runs the gamut from traditional oil paintings to conceptual pieces like the recent *Unread Book Project*, a library made up of neglected tomes that could be freely checked out by patrons. 25 GRAND AVE., MERCURYTWENTY.COM.

**C** At seven years old, **21 Grand** is one of the most established art spaces in Oakland. The nonprofit also sponsors experimental music and poetry readings in its vast exhibition space, which can accommodate almost anything from framed photography and temporary wall drawings to video and performance art. 416 25TH ST., 510-444-7263, 21GRAND.ORG.

**D** In its casual coffee-shop guise, **Mama Buzz** is a regular meeting place for many of Oakland's musicians and zine writers, as well as a frequent spot for open-mike evenings. It also shows a diverse cross section of two-dimensional artwork from the community, including local artist/gallerists and eighth-graders from Oakland's Melrose Leadership Academy. 2318 TELEGRAPH AVE., 510-465-4073, MAMABUZZCAFE.COM.

Room-size installations comprising materials as diverse as bathtubs and toy soldiers transform **Blank Space** (not shown on map) into a wholly new, totally immersive environment each month. For collectors whose homes can't handle such thorough rearrangement, the gallery also sells artist-made crafts, including sketchbooks and tote bags. 6608 SAN PABLO AVE., 510-547-6608, BLANKSPACEGALLERY.COM. **J.K.**





## Here's hoping for the politics of hope.

**It's a hot summer day in Oakland.** Ron Dellums stands on the steps of city hall **A**, surveying the gathering crowd. Dark-suited, white-haired, and imposingly tall, the new mayor is possessed of a lion-in-winter gravitas, part kindly grandfather and part drill sergeant. He is on hand to unveil a citywide HIV-testing initiative, the sort of thing that doesn't make the news but saves lives.

"We're gonna educate each other, so we will embrace the idea of Oakland as a model city," he says, "of Oakland as a city where every single human being has a right to a healthy life. We're 400,000 people—big enough to be significant, but small enough to get our hands around the problem." He's used this line dozens of times over the past few years, but if anyone in the crowd is tired of hearing it, they don't let on.

Spend some time listening to Dellums, and you'll hear a lot about this "model city" and his quest to forge a progressive metropolis from the tired bones of the former one. At the risk of stating the obvious: Oakland has been a perennial underachiever, weighed down by crime, poverty, and drugs. Dellums' model city posits a different Oakland altogether, a civic rebirth coupled with a determination to treat underlying causes, a fervent belief that all the dots—health, economics, housing, crime, education—must be connected for the city to move forward.

So far, Dellums' citizen task forces are the highest-profile piece of the puzzle. From the onset of his campaign, Dellums has insisted that his administration will not make policy from on high so much as solicit it from below. Since his election last year, these grassroots groups of 800 Oaklanders have been meeting in secret to hash out solutions to the city's problems.

It's all part of a grand plan and entirely what you'd expect from the leftist Congressman from West Oakland, the guy who brought sanctions on apartheid South Africa and killed the B2 bomber. The only problem is, much of Dellums' actual agenda is still something of a mystery. The task forces so far have yielded a weird mix of the substantive, such as the proposal to hire a crime czar for the city (which Dellums embraced) and the featherweight, like the idea to commission a PR campaign to make Oaklanders feel better about themselves (which Dellums is said to be studying). And the mayor has yet to declare his stance on development—the issue many feel is key to the city's resurgence—save to quash a condo project in industrial West Oakland until a citywide rezoning study can be finished.

Then, too, no one seems to know how the mayor spends his days. Aside from some press conferences and town hall meetings, Dellums sightings are as rare as bobcats in the hills, and the press has hammered him for it.

His defenders say that's just Dellums' style: low-key and media-averse. But style or no style, others say, that's no way to run a city.

"I don't know who's minding the store over there," says Zennie Abraham, a sports business entrepreneur who worked with former mayors Jerry Brown and Elihu Harris. "People have the impression that they're just hanging out. They might be doing great things, but we wouldn't know."

Also, as compelling as the model city vision sounds, it has often been obscured by the more immediate concerns that dominate headlines here—the sky-high crime rate and the garbage strike that, for a month this summer, transformed the city into a simulacrum of Dickens-era London, only with palm trees. "The model city can come later," says Ishmael Reed, the renowned poet and author of *Blues City: A Walk in Oakland*. "Stop the fucking crime." Reed, who lives in West Oakland, says he supports Dellums but has little patience for pie-in-the-sky proposals. "The number one issue in Oakland is crime, and until that's dealt with, all these visionary ideas should be set aside."

But in the end, maybe the day-to-day details aren't what people elected Dellums for. "It's the overriding sense of inspiration he provides," says Patricia Durham, a 30-year Oakland resident and cofounder of a youth scholarship nonprofit. "Sure, we need our potholes fixed, but we also need that larger vision."

After the HIV-testing press conference, I'm sitting in Dellums' press secretary's office when the mayor sticks his head in to say hello. What follows is a tour de force, his entire worldview delivered in the space of five minutes. "We're in the middle of the reurbanization of America," he says, sounding a note of urgency. "And it isn't gonna get any easier when we have more people. So we gotta do it now."

As he works his way around to the model city, his face brightens. He's almost bouncing on his toes. "We need to address the crime, the health services, the schools," he says. "They're all connected."

**I'm rooted in my seat, dumbstruck by the sudden onslaught. Plus, there's that voice: silky, theatrical, rising and falling with the practiced cadence of a showman. He's gesturing with his hands, riffing. There are no policy points here; there is only Dellums' vision. But while he's talking, I see what he sees.** His model city is right there for the taking. "I want to harness the brilliance and creativity of the people of Oakland—I can't do it by myself. This is the model city I'm talking about."

"Hold me to it," he says.

He winks at me and, just like that, he's gone. ■ CHRIS SMITH

Dellums (right) left politics when he stepped down from Congress in 1998, but he was recruited by East Bay leftist troops to return to his hometown of Oakland to run for mayor in the 2006 election. He's got grand ideas, but a year into his reign, it's still tough to pin him down on the specifics.





## The culinary revolution pushes south toward the lake.



Grand Avenue is a great place to go if you need a manicure—more than a dozen nail salons dot the eight-block commercial strip—but not if you're looking for a good meal, let alone a prototypical Bay Area dining experience. That's set to change, though, when Camino **A**, the new restaurant from 20-year Chez Panisse veteran Russell Moore and his partner, Allison Hopelain, opens there early next year.

Oakland certainly isn't hurting for great places to eat: Oliveto and À Côté **B** on College Avenue were recently joined by the new Wood Tavern; Piedmont Avenue, home to Bay Wolf **C** for more than 30 years, has grown into a Gourmet Ghetto of its own. Many fine restaurants line the strip, including Italian-inflected Dopo **D** and a second outpost of Berkeley's popular tapas bar, César **E**. And eight years after Doña Tomas **F** opened in Temescal, another former Chez Panisser started Pizzaiolo **G** next door, followed by the absurdly popular Bakesale Betty **H** down the street, bringing about a revival to that once dingy block of Telegraph. Meanwhile, Tamarindo, B Restaurant, and the new Levende East (see page 220) are bringing new life to downtown's Old Oakland.

Moore and Hopelain are betting that Grand Avenue is ready for the same type of restaurant-induced renewal. This spring, the two signed a lease on a brick building that was once the site of the Country Home Furniture store. **The focal point of the 80-seat dining room will be a huge stone fireplace being built in Sonoma by a Frenchman who claims his family has been in the stonemasonry business since the time of the Crusades.**

In this elegant setting, Moore will cook dishes like lamb's leg à la sicelle (hanging by a string in front of the fire) and coils of housemade herb

sausages. Near the front door will be a small bar, where bar manager Thad Zogler, the couple's first employee, will mix cocktails with the same attention to artistry that Moore will implement in the kitchen.

Moore and Hopelain didn't set out to be urban pioneers. For more than three years, the couple trailed real estate agents around San Francisco, but according to Hopelain, "Every time we got serious about a space in San Francisco, there was always a hitch." Their last negotiation came to a halt when the city put a moratorium on developments in Dogpatch because of zoning problems. That's when the two decided to look elsewhere, and eventually set their sights on Oakland.

"We ended up choosing Oakland for a lot of reasons," says Moore. "The commute [the couple lives in Richmond], the welcoming community, and the fact that this was an area without a lot of restaurants." But ultimately, it was Oakland's greatest asset—its glorious mix of people—that won the couple over.

"San Francisco is a very diverse city," says Hopelain, "but you don't see that reflected in the restaurants there. In Oakland, you see all kinds of people going out to eat: black, white, Latino, Asian, young, and old." Theirs, they hope, will be a place where the cops and the firemen are as comfortable as the bankers and the hip-hop crowd. ■ **JAN NEWBERRY**

Russell Moore (in photo, at left) cooked at Chez Panisse for 20 years, but now he and his partner, Allison Hopelain, are set to open Camino, which promises to be a destination eatery on sleepy Grand Avenue.

### The migration continues

Rising labor costs and out-of-control rents in San Francisco are making Oakland seem very appetizing to many local restaurateurs looking to expand. Here's a taste of the new restaurants slated to open across the water in the next 12 months.

**Ozumo:** looking at two new properties in the city's uptown neighborhood. The first would offer an *izakaya* (pub)-style menu on the ground floor of the new Broadway Grand condo development; and the second, which also includes plans for a wine shop and bar, will go into the basement of the Gothic Revival Cathedral Building.

**Flora:** also in Uptown, it's a new cocktail lounge and restaurant from Thomas Schnetz and Donna Savitsky of Temescal's popular upscale Mexican eatery, Doña Tomas. It's opening in the old Floral Depot Building, on Telegraph Avenue, a cobalt-colored, silver-crowned art deco treasure.

**Globe:** Joseph Manzare and his partners at Globe are laying plans for what they call a Bronx-Italian restaurant.





OAKLAND'S TURN | Neighborhoods

**The good life just got calmer, sunnier, and cheaper.**

**As the aspiring homeowner population** in San Francisco bursts at the seams, many may discover that their hearts really belong to Oakland. And even if they can afford the most famous of the city's single-family-with-yard neighborhoods, like Rockridge and Montclair, they'd be smart not to limit themselves to those magnet areas. Oakland harbors several under-the-radar, charming neighborhoods with homes that are crazy bargains by San Francisco standards—a 2,000-square-foot home in Glenview (like the one pictured above) costs a mind-boggling \$600,000 less than a comparable one in Noe Valley—and offer access to well-rated public elementary schools. Talk to the people living in the five hoods on the following pages, and they'll tell you: life on this side of the bridge is no compromise.

Jay Ward (right) lived in Twin Peaks for two years, but when it came time to trade up, he and his family decided on Piedmont Pines. Not only did he get more for his money—a 1959 three-bedroom with a beautiful canyon view—but “the weather in Oakland is better, the cost of living is lower, and there's more parking,” he says.





## Laurel District/Redwood Heights

### Sunny diversity for the middle class and up

Laurel district and Redwood Heights residents are a bit smug about the fact that they live in a banana belt. The fog hangs farther up the hill, leaving them smiling at the sun. In the Laurel, you'll find mostly neat, boxy, little two-bedroom bungalows with postage-stamp lawns. It's a great starter hood for singles and young families, with prices from the \$450,000 to the \$600,000s. And demographically, it's what the world should be: a bona fide salad bowl of ethnicities, religions, and sexual orientations.

Just up the hill is Redwood Heights, with some sweeping bay views, larger homes, and eclectic architecture ranging from Spanish Mediterranean to post-WWII ranch, traditional to Tudor. It was once populated by massive redwoods, but they were chopped down for lumber in the late 1800s. There's a silver lining, though: the logging left space for this neighborhood to grow. Many houses here—ranging from \$550,000 to about \$800,000—date back to the early 1900s, and you'll never mistake yours for someone's down the street.

"You're in a city when you live here, but you're really not," says Redwood Heights resident Marilyn Beardsley, a real estate attorney. "It's old-fashioned—my street has a block party every September. People roll their barbecues out, and one side of the street makes salad, one side dessert." Across Highway 13 is verdant Joaquin Miller Park, where the poet planted 70,000 trees that locals enjoy as they walk their dogs or hike in the woods after work and on weekends.

For shopping, there's a Farmer Joe's for organic produce down on MacArthur, and Montclair Village is only two freeway exits away. And both the Laurel district and Redwood Heights take advantage of a great new recreational center on Redwood Road, where kids can attend ballet while their parents head to yoga. A nearby casting pond (sans fish) is also popular on Saturday mornings, and moms and dads like to hang out and shoot the breeze at the community park on Jordan Road and Bennett Place while their kids fly on the swing sets.

## Piedmont Pines

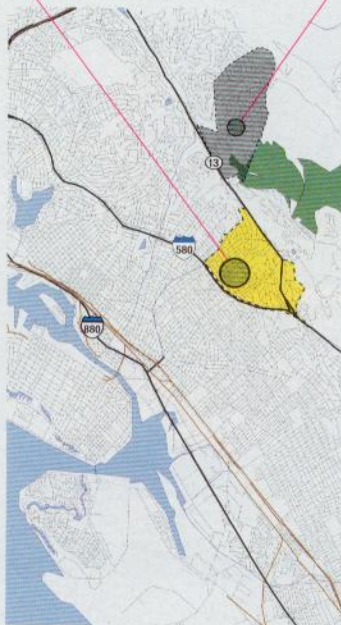
### Nature for folks with serious cash

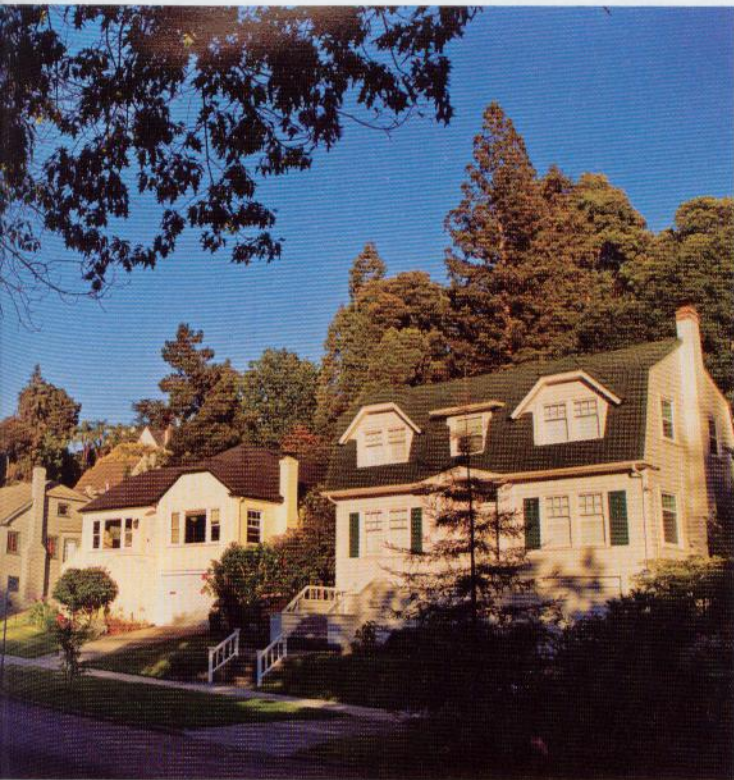
For people who want rivetingly beautiful bay views, Piedmont Pines is one of the prime locations in the Bay Area. Despite its name, it has nothing to do with the municipality of Piedmont; the neighborhood tucked in the hills on the other side of Highway 13. But even if you never set foot in the parklands, the trees are thick on every street—as the pines gradually die off, they're being replaced by California natives and oaks. "At my house, it feels like I'm in Tahoe," says resident Jay Ward, CEO of the African American social networking site 1stFridays.com. Homes are nestled into hillsides along the twisty streets, and few sidewalks exist. Ward, who migrated to Oakland from San Francisco's Twin Peaks in 2001, says he can't imagine ever moving back to the city.

Updated '60s-style ranchers prevail, although a few Cape Cods, Craftsman, and Tudor specimens are sprinkled throughout. Homes here tend to be very large and not cheap: every once in a while, you can find an 800-square-foot fixer-upper in the high \$700,000s, but the higher end of the range is more common and can reach \$2.3 million.

Neighbors work together to constantly upgrade the community, brainstorming on the active neighborhood association's website about such issues as emergency preparedness, utility undergrounding, and lost orange tabbies. Shopping, cafés, and restaurants are an easy jaunt away at Montclair Village, just down Mountain Boulevard.

This quiet, elegant neighborhood does have its quirks. By tradition, people paint a set of rocks at the entrance to Piedmont Pines with birthday messages, wedding tidings, and other salutations. The only rule is that you have to be cool with the fact that someone else will soon paint over your message.





## Crocker Highlands

### Truly historic homes

For those who want to live in a big, gorgeous historic home surrounded by trees, but also want to be near a thriving urban center, Crocker Highlands (next to Trestle Glen) is the ticket. The main catch is that the starting price is \$800,000 or so, and prices go up to almost \$2 million. (Still, these are bargains compared to what you'll find in Piedmont next door.) If you've got the scratch, the neighborhood can deliver natural beauty, peace, and a huge Tudor, Mediterranean, or Monterey Colonial with a giant backyard. You'll also have access to the shops, restaurants, and bars on busy Lakeshore and Grand Avenues—including the beloved collective Arizmendi Bakery and the Grand Lake Theater, with its Mighty Wurlitzer organ—just a short walk or drive away. In addition, the neighborhood boasts a powerhouse homeowners association (the oldest HOA west of the Mississippi), with regular business hours. And don't forget nearby Lake Merritt for evening strolls or rows.

In recent years, families with young children have infiltrated the hood, so strollers are everywhere. New residents learn quickly that Crocker does have a few rules: you can't remove trees over a certain size, and if you want to upgrade your home, you have to check with the HOA first for architectural approvals. This protocol may seem daunting, but it's helped make Crocker one of the most beautiful neighborhoods in Oakland, and possibly the prettiest near downtown.



## Glenview

### Craftsman architecture and a mix of neighbors

Some real estate agents refer to this eclectic district, bisected by busy Park Boulevard, as the next Rockridge. One attraction, as in the Laurel district and Redwood Heights, is the sunshine: "The fog makes a doughnut hole over Glenview," says Christian Downer, who lives and sells homes in the area. Her neighborhood is big on Craftsman architecture, with houses built in the early 1900s starting at \$650,000 for a cozy two-bedroom and going up to the \$900,000s and occasionally \$1 million. Front yards are generally small, although there are some bigger ones out back.

Glenview's commercial district is just a few blocks long, but definitely cute and friendly. The Blackberry Bistro serves shrimp and grits and other southern specialties, and there's a burger joint, a Thai place, a Mexican place, the Cheshire Cat vet, and a coffee shop. (Caffe Trieste, take note: Glenview wants you.) Glenview residents often pop over to Montclair Village or hit the big Farmer Joe's on Fruitvale.

Glenview citizens have replaced the local watering hole with Glenfriends, a Yahoo group with a moderator where they bandy about such topics as city politics, babysitters, garbage lockouts, and where to find silkworms for their kids' science projects. Just about everyone with a computer signs on, and there's a nice mix of people. "You might have a judge living next door to a plumber," says resident Michael Gabriel, who works in nonprofit housing, and whose wife, Barbara, runs a ballet school. "It's not at all pretentious. The people down at the grocery store know your kids, and neighbors look out for each other in a casual way, without being busybodies." ■ PEGGY NAUTS

## Small is beautiful in the public schools.



In 2003, the already distressed Oakland Unified School District truly bottomed out. The chronically underperforming district was \$70 million in the red and famously dysfunctional. In the largest public school bailout in California history, the state tossed out Superintendent Dennis Chaconas and seized control of the elected school board and the district. Given that 89 percent of Oakland kids go to public school (versus 70 percent in San Francisco), and 69 percent are poor enough to qualify for a free or cut-rate lunch, this was clearly a public crisis.

But Oakland must have hit the ground running, because a mere four years later, the turnaround has been astounding. Millions of dollars from heavy-hitter foundations have poured in, along with unflappable young talent and gutsy ideas—and the results are impressive. API scores are up in many places; of the 34 elementary and middle schools in the lowest performing category (with scores below 500) in 1999, zero remain there. And since 2003, the number of graduates qualified to enter the UC and CSU systems has nearly doubled.

There's no doubt that major work remains at all levels, particularly in the high schools, but Steven Seleznow, of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, says Oakland is "among the top three most comprehensively innovating school districts in the country right now."

One of the big ideas driving this revival is the move to get small. In 2000, the district had enacted a policy to create 10 new small schools, the idea being that smaller schools mean more personal attention and greater accountability. Juiced by \$15.7 million from Gates, who has now invested close to \$40 million in Oakland school reform, and in partnership with the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, the district made itself the western frontier of this educational experiment. The effort was focused entirely in the lower-income flatlands of East and West Oakland. (Thanks to activist parents and flush local educational foundations, many of the more affluent hill neighborhoods, including Rockridge, Montclair, and Hillcrest, have high-quality elementary schools.)

After the 2003 meltdown, parents and community activists rallied to ensure that new state-appointed top dog Randy Ward embraced the concept. "We said, 'Yeah, this is bad. But how do we protect what we've done?' We got out in front to make the case for these

schools and urge them to think long-term," says Lillian Lopez, a parent with Oakland Community Organizations.

To date, 44 new small schools have sprung up in this district of 131 schools. Most of the underperforming schools have been broken into two or more new schools or closed altogether. And of the six high schools in notorious danger zones, three have been split into 10 academies, with impressive results. The new schools boast a new mission and teacher roster, and, in many cases, a new principal.

ACORN Woodland Elementary **A**, at the corner of 81st and Rudsdale, is one of the small-school success stories. Long home to an abandoned building that looked like a prison, the school is now bursting with potential. Another elementary school, EnCompass Academy **B**, sits across an airy, flower-filled courtyard. The sparkly \$19.3 million campus, which opened in 2005, includes an outdoor amphitheater, high-ceilinged classrooms, and two Ivy League-pedigreed, 34-year-old principals, and is the second newly built school site in East Oakland in 35 years. The students are as transformed as the space. "Kids are glowing at the cellular level," says EnCompass's effusive principal, Minh-Tram Nguyen.

No one knows if the momentum at these small schools can be sustained. Oakland Unified's improving API scores are still well below the 800 California target, and most schools are far from where they need to be to actually attract parents who can afford one of the East Bay's many respected private schools. But most agree that hope, at least, has returned.

The excitement has even spilled over into the neighborhood, says David Kerr, a realtor who sells homes in Elmhurst. "More people are saying, 'I want to be close to this. I want to get my kid into this school.' Even housing prices, which used to be in the \$200,000 to \$300,000 range, are moving into the high \$300,000s and low \$400,000s." Important news for parts of the city that are still playing catch-up on many fronts. ■ DIANA KAPP

Dynamic young principals Kimi Kean of ACORN Woodland Elementary (left) and Minh-Tram Nguyen of EnCompass Academy (right) in the refurbished courtyard between the two schools. Both K-5 schools have around 250 students.





# Unpolished is the new glam.



**The romance of the Ruby Room **A** and Radio **B**,** bar owner Alfredo Botello's two trendsetting downtown Oakland hangouts, is of the rock 'n' roll variety—that raw, anything-goes vibe for which San Francisco's Mission district was once famous before bars like Skylark and Double Dutch moved in. Now that too many bars and clubs on the other side of the bridge have forsaken cheap and arty in favor of glitzy, the Bay Area's starving-artist set (and their slumming hangers-on, who, let's face it, aren't starving at all) have been flocking here.

Botello's spots personify an anti-glam spirit that eschews bottle service, double-digit cover charges, and other showy trappings in favor of time-honored basics: loud music, strong drinks, and a down-and-dirty atmosphere more suited to Keith Richards than Lindsay Lohan. This vibe has spawned a second generation of unpretentiously hip watering holes (see "All new, all cool," this page). Says Botello, summing up the mood: "We don't have to try to catch up with San Francisco anymore. People are coming here from the city and other parts of the Bay Area, which is really cool."

Botello is the pioneer to listen to. Flashback to 1999, when the Berkeley grad, then 31, shelved his architecture degree and took over the lease on the downtown "old man's bar" that would become the Ruby Room. Unemployment, poverty, and suburban sprawl had taken a dramatic toll on the once bustling neighborhood. When the neighborhood's parking garages emptied and the office workers went home, its barren streets, lined with empty storefronts, became a stomping ground for derelicts and other unsavory characters.

"When I was in school, you either found a ride into San Francisco or you crashed a frat party," recalls Botello. While he did his share of both, he had his eye on downtown Oakland even back then. "One of my architecture professors sent us on a bus tour of the area, and I was totally blown away," he says. "The historic buildings gave downtown a very romantic quality, which I wanted to capture in a club."

Eight years later, the dimly lit Ruby Room is packed nightly with tattooed twenty- and thirty-something artists, students, and musicians in concert tees and thrift-store denim. Some take turns shooting pool and others make small talk, while tipsy patrons swill and sway to everything from indie rock and laptop techno to honky-tonk, new wave, and dusty soul.

A few blocks away at Radio, down-for-it drinkers bask in the warm red glow of the giant lanterns hanging overhead, alternating between the much loved pinball machine, the small, barely lit makeout area in the back, and the chain-link-fence-lined lounge upstairs.

Meanwhile, eight blocks up Broadway at Luka's Taproom & Lounge, and across the lake at Easy Lounge, relaxed-looking Saturday-night crowds talk and dance in place as they pack the bars two and three deep. **The uniform is street party (read: oodles of denim), and the mix so perfectly multiethnic it seems like the set of a Benetton ad.** Witnessing this flowering scene, Botello loves how many other businesses are following his lead. "Oakland lived in San Francisco's shadow for the longest time." ■ **BILL PICTURE**

RUBY ROOM, 132 14TH ST., 510-444-7224.  
RADIO, 435 13TH ST., 510-451-2889.

**Gritty chic, Oakland-style:** at the Easy Lounge (upper right, lower right, and lower left), the crowd ranges from barflies to break dancers to residents on the love hunt. At Luka's Taproom & Lounge (top left and middle left), one of Broadway's best restaurants, the mood is more bistro than beer hall—until late weekend nights, when the action takes off.

## All new, all cool

A handful of smaller venues in the Uptown district are now fanning the flames of the city's bantam rock scene, while stylish watering holes north of 19th Street and just east of Lake Merritt are affording new options to the city's party set.

The beer is cheap, the music is loud, punk is the name of the game, and it's always Christmas at the **Stork Club **C****, a home away from home for local rockers. 2330 TELEGRAPH AVE., 510-444-6174, STORKCLUBOAKLAND.COM.

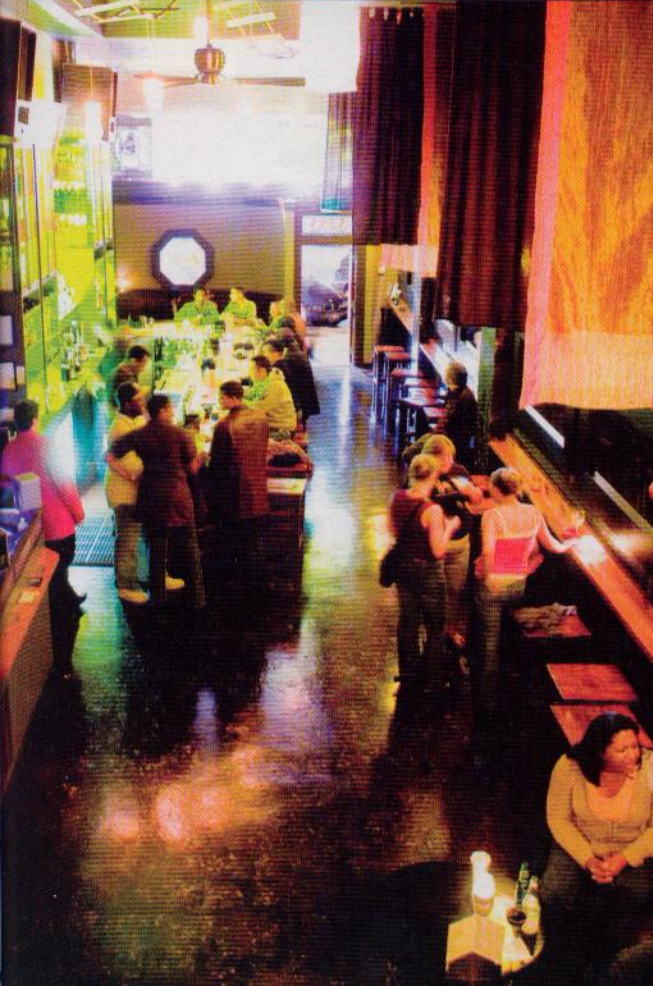
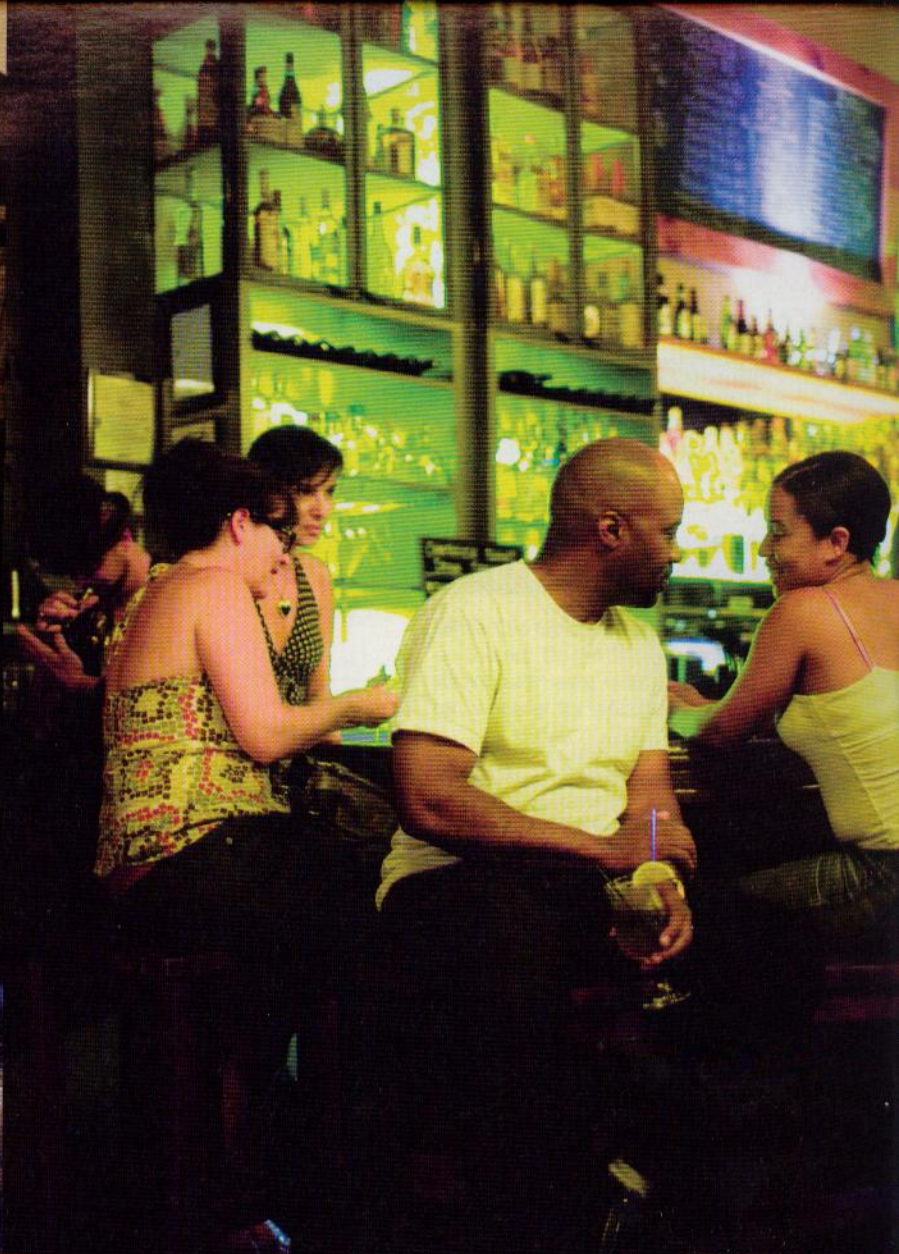
Its gorgeous, saloon-style wood bar gives **The Uptown **D****, a retail space turned rock club, an old-time dance-hall feel—but the cutting-edge indie-rock, metal, and hip-hop acts in the club's lineup are thoroughly modern. 1928 TELEGRAPH AVE., 510-451-8100, UPTOWNNIGHTCLUB.COM.

**Luka's Taproom & Lounge **E**** got its name from a stray pup taken in by the popular café-bar's owners. But its impressive selection of Belgian beers, rotating roster of DJs, and late-night menu—including gourmet mac 'n' cheese and a burger to die for—are hardly for the dogs. 2221 BROADWAY, 510-451-4677, LUKASOAKLAND.COM.

Comfortably sleek surroundings, nightly DJ-spun beats, and tasty concoctions have secured a place on the Oakland map for **Easy Lounge **F****. Every Saturday, the lounge's cocktail chefs dream up a drink special using produce from nearby Lake Merritt Farmers' Market. 3255 LAKESHORE AVE., 510-338-4911, EASY510.COM.

The atmosphere at **Z Café and Bar **G**** is noticeably more civilized than that of its rowdier downtown contemporaries, but the laid-back vibe and reasonably priced drink menu, which includes 17 different martinis, make Z a perfect first stop on the night's itinerary. 2735 BROADWAY, 510-663-2905, ZCAFEANDBAR.COM.

Though not spanking new, **Café van Kleef **H**** has become an anchor of the downtown scene with its live jazz, impeccable cocktails, and artist-heavy crowd. 1621 TELEGRAPH AVE., 510-763-771, CAFEVANKLEEF.COM.





# Is Old Oakland poised to become the new Hayes Street?



For years, going on decades, Old Oakland has been like a movie set of a cool urban shopping street, with fine old brick buildings, a ready supply of walk-ons (the Friday farmers' market offers a Felliniesque parade of faces), and great natural light. What it lacked, though, was a steady cast of actors and any actual stores. (Oakland has long had a department store scarcity: I. Magnin declared bankruptcy in the early '90s, leaving only Sears **A** at Broadway and 19th.) As a young couple living in Uptown, Alfonso Dominguez and Johnelle Mancha used to ride their bikes along the sidewalks of Washington and Ninth Streets and peek inside the empty storefronts, imagining the possibilities. The quaint Old Oakland Historic District, despite its obvious promise, had seen little action since the opening of the Transcontinental Railroad and grand hotels in the mid-1800s. Why, they fumed, was the area so dead? Why did they have to cross the bridge every time they got a craving to window-shop on a hip street?

Now, thanks in large part to this style-obsessed couple—they're both design-school grads with impeccable taste—the neighborhood may be on its way to finally staging that movie. Though still only half-developed, in the past year Old Oakland has suddenly become a place where people can feed a variety of desires—to shop for clothing, to eat a fine meal, to sit and read the *New Yorker* or the *Sporting Green* outdoors with a bowl of cappuccino—all at once. Besides the four enterprises Dominguez and Mancha are involved in, other new stores and restaurants are opening regularly: Ajuda Day Spa, Air Lounge, Verse **B** (with street-wise sneakers and graphic tees), Levende East, and, by the end of the year, the women's clothing store Sistren. Says Martin Durante, 81, whose family's international market, G.B. Ratto's, has been the neighborhood's one consistent draw since before the Depression, "Old Oakland is cooking again." Mancha even likes to imagine this becoming

a down-to-earth version of Berkeley's exceedingly popular Fourth Street, with a bakery, a gelato shop, additional clothing boutiques, and more.

The change was actually jump-started two years ago by Dominguez's mother, Gloria, when—working side by side with Dominguez and Mancha—she opened the modern and inviting Mexican restaurant Tamarindo **C** on Eighth Street. **In retrospect, the move was risky beyond reason. "Other restaurants had come and failed," Mancha says. "The neighborhood wasn't there yet. But we'd already fallen in love with this place, so there was no going back."**

As Gloria's food earned rave reviews (including in this magazine), the customers did go back, and the next step was obvious: give people something to do between meals. First Mancha and her mother opened Mignonne **D**, a cottagelike space they stock with French antiques and accessories alongside modern and reworked vintage furniture. Then the couple opened Drift **E**, an industrial space that features of-the-moment denims ranging from the established (think Paperdenim&cloth) to lesser-known Australian and Japanese labels. (Durante recently bought a pair of jeans there.) Finally, this July, Dominguez and fellow Cal Poly alum Sean Matthews unveiled Fiveten Studio **F**, a gallery (which doubles as a design studio) that showcases modern pieces that might easily fit inside the many lofts under construction down the street, like geometric room dividers and installations woven with horsehair.

High hopes for Old Oakland have been dashed before. After the Storek brothers restored most of the condemned properties in the 1970s, everything looked great until business after business died. But Elena Voiron, Durante's daughter, who now runs Ratto's, says this time the promise is real. "There are so many more people who work and live here now. I think all of those businesses would thrive today." Mancha is even less circumspect. "When people catch the 'it' vibe, they want to come here and build something, too." ■

#### STEPHANIE SIMONS

TAMARINDO: 468 8TH ST., 510-444-1944, TAMARINDOANTOJERIA.COM; MIGNONNE: 1000 JEFFERSON ST., 510-444-5288, MIGNONNEDECOR.COM; DRIFT: 815 WASHINGTON ST., 510-444-8815, DRIFTDENIM.COM; FIVETEN STUDIO: 831 BROADWAY, 510-451-9900, FIVETENSTUDIO.COM.

Serial entrepreneurs Alfonso Dominguez and Johnelle Mancha are two major reasons Old Oakland is becoming a style discovery zone. They're pictured at left inside Fiveten Studio, the fourth storefront between them, an art and furniture gallery on Broadway that Dominguez co-owns with Sean Matthews.

#### Browse-worthy

While Old Oakland is getting in on the act, Rockridge's College Avenue remains pretty much the city's center for fashionable retail.

**August:** This avant-garde boutique, for both men and women, satisfies a craving for premium European denim, as well as clothing by Edun, Rogan, Martin Margiela, Vena Cava, and Band of Outsiders. It also carries some ravishing jewelry, including necklaces by Oakland-based Morgania Moore. 5410 COLLEGE AVE., 510-652-2711, AUGUSTSHOP.COM.

**Form Vintage Modern:** A favorite among furniture aficionados, family-owned Form specializes in vintage Danish decor and contemporary American design. Furnish a mod *maison* with pieces by Tonelli, Alessi, Modernica, and Vancouver-based Bombast. 5330 COLLEGE AVE., 510-420-1950, FORMVINTAGEMODERN.COM.

**Twenty-Two:** Chic footwear and handbags sketched by Oakland-based owners Alexandra and Chris Silverman are brought to life by Italian craftsmen for this elegant little shop. 5856 COLLEGE AVE., 510-594-2201, TWENTYTWO SHOES.COM.

**Iniam:** This decidedly airy, mood-lifting space is devoted to designer threads by 3.1 Phillip Lim, Theory, Vince, James Perse, Twinkle, and others. Newer additions include shoes by Tory Burch and baubles by up-and-coming *ila&i* jewelry. 5902 COLLEGE AVE., 510-597-1558, INIAM.COM.

**Scout Home Hardware:** Five minutes from College Avenue, in Temescal, this far-from-ordinary hardware store offers vintage home furnishings, including lighting, textiles, antiques, and accessories. 5026 TELEGRAPH AVE., 510-547-2688, SCOUTHARDWARE.COM. **S.S.**

## People are taking crime into their own hands.

**On a balmy summer evening in upscale Rockridge, as the postwork crowd fills café tables on College Avenue, about 75 people pack the public library, sweating a little below the oscillating fans. Young and old, tattooed and tie-dyed, a mix of races—all have come to discuss crime in their neighborhood. They listen to presentations on home security systems, forming citizens' walking patrols, and organizing neighborhood watch groups. At one point, there's a collective gasp when a teenager in baggy jeans and a bright red cap dashes into the room, snatches a leather satchel from the back counter, and disappears down the steps. Could that really just have happened? But soon it dawns on everyone that it was only a test—to see how well they could describe the "thief."**

Neighborhood crime meetings have been going on here for years, but these days, they have new urgency: violent crime in Rockridge has almost doubled this year. Criminals have robbed people on their way to BART, broken into their homes, held guns to their heads, and mugged them in broad daylight.

Of course, the terror doesn't remotely compare to what's been taking place—and always has—in West and East Oakland, where all but a smattering of last year's near-record 148 murders occurred. The flatlands might well be one of the most dangerous places in America to be a young black man: 70 percent of last year's murder victims were African American; and nearly half of all victims were age 24 or under. Here in the city's traditional killing fields, the violence grinds on in its awful, inexorable way, seemingly immune to any triage measures the city's leaders throw at it.

But what hasn't grabbed headlines until recently is that many of Oakland's more affluent neighborhoods are also suffering. Residents don't live in daily fear of a stray bullet, but their sense of safety—for themselves and their kids—has been threatened. By the end of July of this year, the number of violent robberies and assaults in Glenview had gone to 26 from 16 in the same seven-month stretch of '06; sleepy Montclair, way up in the hills, had almost as many burglaries (33) in one 90-day period this year as it had during all of last year.

**After a surge in armed robberies and assaults in the Grand Lake district, residents even invited the Guardian Angels to town. You could see them patrolling Lakeshore Avenue this summer in their red berets. Blink hard: if you didn't know better, you'd think it was the early 1990s, when the crack epidemic raged.**

No one really knows why crime is up this year in Oakland—or in the rest of the country either—but it's easy to see why the city can't cope. For one, it just doesn't have enough cops: proportionally, Oakland has half as many officers as New York City, and a third less than Washington, D.C. To make up for the deficit, police have been

swarming "hot spots"—in East Oakland, for example—and, in the process, leaving lower-crime areas virtually unprotected. It amounts to a citywide game of Whack-a-Mole and helps explain why a place like Rockridge feels vulnerable. Susan Montauk, who chairs the area's neighborhood crime prevention council, explains, "As the cops put it to me, 'You think the criminals don't talk to each other? They know where to find the easier targets.'"

Police Chief Wayne Tucker and Mayor Ron Dellums are scrambling to get more officers on the streets and have a plan to divide the city into three districts, each with a captain who will know a defined area intimately. And, true to his lefty roots, Dellums is committed to tackling the underlying causes of crime: the lack of jobs, the poor public schools. He is looking to hire a crime czar, a first-ever position in Oakland that would oversee the city's often fractured crime prevention efforts. And he wants to fully implement community policing: instead of riding around in patrol cars waiting for the next call, cops would be integrated into the neighborhoods they serve, walking beats and talking to residents, working with them to deter crime.

Most of these efforts will take years to show results. In the meantime, citizens from Ghost Town to Grand Lake are stepping into the breach with neighborhood crime-watch groups. Toward the end of a recent meeting in upper Fruitvale, a shaggy-haired man in shorts and a T-shirt stands up to talk. He lives in a nearby East Oakland neighborhood plagued by drug dealing, graffiti, and theft, but he has a hopeful story. He and other locals got together, he says, and took back his neighborhood's main drag from the drug posses and stick-up kids that had ruled it for years. Some watched the streets and noted license plates, some called the cops every time they spotted something suspicious, and some took surreptitious photos of the perps. "We kicked butt, and we're winning," he says, beaming. "And there's no way we're giving it back."

Every summer, the city holds National Night Out, in which citizens throw similar anticrime block parties aimed at building neighborhood cohesion. Just a few years ago, there were 35 gatherings; this year, there were 315. As Don Link, chairman of the city's Community Policing Advisory Board, puts it: once an effective neighborhood group gets up and running, "you can watch the crime rates go down." ■ CHRIS SMITH

**After a few years of relative calm, crime is once again the number one issue in Oakland—and not just in notoriously dangerous neighborhoods. Places like Glenview, Temescal, and even Rockridge are getting a small taste of what Fruitvale always feels like.**

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