

MANSION



Kerry Kelly for The Wall Street Journal (3)

BUILDING OF INDUSTRY Once home to the Schmidt Lithograph Company, the Clocktower houses 127 apartments. The tower, top left; a public stairway; the loft of Claude Dupuis and Paule Dubois, above.

WHO LIVES HERE

A Small Town in an Old Printing Plant

A stone's throw from the Bay Bridge and the home of the San Francisco Giants, a converted live/work building is home to an eclectic community that includes painters, architects and Internet entrepreneurs

BY NANCY KEATES

ABOUT 100 FEET from an off-ramp of San Francisco's Bay Bridge sits a former lithograph plant of brick, timber and concrete. Marked by a 170-foot-high steel-frame clock tower, it is just down the block from the Giants' home stadium, in the middle of the gentrifying but still gritty South of Market district.

Inside, the space has the feel of a college dorm. Residents mingle in an open courtyard where tall palm trees add a tropical note. There is an ele-



PETER MOSSNER The building's unofficial social planner, he organizes the annual door-to-door cocktail party.



AUDREY COOPER, KIRK SEWARD AND COLE "It has a Midwestern friendliness," says Ms. Cooper, managing editor of the San Francisco Chronicle

Naitry, 36, says it was partly the sense of community in the building that drew them. "Everyone is really nice here," he says. The couple pay \$4,000 a month for their one bedroom, one bathroom, 1,306-square-foot loft. Peter Mossner, who works for a global chemicals and plastics company, is the unofficial social planner, organizing the annual door-to-door cocktail party. He paid \$420,000 in 2002 for his 900-square-foot one-bedroom.

"It's a funny collection of people. It has a Midwestern friendliness with an industrial feel," is how Ms. Cooper, the

vator, but the more social option is a wide, hammered metal-and-wood stairway that connects the first two floors.

Now known as the Clocktower, the two-building complex houses 127 apartments, each with a different layout. Next to each front door is a different placard, ranging from vintage Yankees cards to a Kandinsky-like watercolor to an Absolut San Francisco ad from a magazine.

The occupants are just as eclectic. There are painters, architects, software entrepreneurs and investment bankers. Audrey Cooper, managing editor of the San Francisco Chronicle, lives here, as does AQ restaurateur Matt Semmelhack. Young digital types in the building include Rick Marini, the CEO of online professional network BranchOut and Daniel Farrar, CEO of Switchfly, an online technology company for travel and financial services.

Connie Wolf, head of Stanford's Cantor Arts Center, purchased her one-bedroom for \$605,000 in 2010. She decided to leave the placard space outside her door blank as a statement that visitors should have no preconceived notion of what they will find inside.

"We've got one of everything," says Tom Burkhart, 74, who says he knows almost half of the Clocktower's other residents by name and often runs into them on the street. In 1993, Mr. Burkhart paid \$710,000 for the almost 2,000-square-foot penthouse unit in



NAITRY AND RICK MARINI "Everyone is really nice here," says Mr. Marini, the founder and CEO of BranchOut.

the clock tower itself; the developer invested another \$175,000, an amount that Mr. Burkhart matched, for improvements. A year later Mr. Burkhart bought a first floor unit in the building to use as an office for his 10-employee investment company which he now commutes to "by fire stairs."

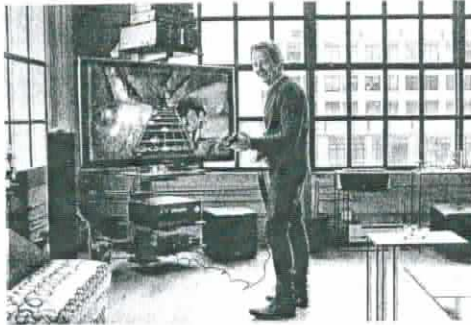
Mr. Semmelhack, who owns the popular AQ restaurant on Mission Street, has been renting a one-bedroom loft for four years for \$2,800 a month. He says his now-wife had refused to live with him until he moved to such a cool loft. "Once she saw the Clocktower she changed her mind," he says. They got married two years ago.

The floor-to-ceiling glass windows in Claude Dupuis and Paule Dubois's loft look directly onto the off-ramp of the

Bay Bridge. The effect creates the uneasy sensation that the cars might drive directly into their 1,800-square-foot, one-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment, though the thickness of the glass keeps the space strangely silent.

"You really see the action here," says Mr. Dupuis, an engineer. The couple, who are Canadian, bought their apartment in 2006 for \$1.1 million. Ms. Dubois, an oil painter, is in charge of decorating the building's Christmas tree that goes in the lobby every year. At night they occasionally leave their front door open and play music, encouraging the neighbors on their floor to stop by.

For decades the building was the home of the Schmidt Lithograph Company, a graphic-arts firm founded in 1872 that produced California fruit-crate labels. Pat Jacobsen,



CLAUDE DUPUIS "You really see the action here," says the engineer; his loft directly faces the off-ramp of the Bay Bridge.

a jazz musician and fruit-label collector who visited the factory in 1981, recalls it as a lively place, with people running around and forklifts carrying goods back and forth. In 1988, the firm was sold and was relocated out of the city; Mr. Jacobsen, a fan, was given the company's archives.

In 1990, developer Rick Holliday bought the building for \$6.8 million and spent \$21 million rehabbing it into one of the first live/work conversions allowed in San Francisco. The idea behind its conversion was to make the Clocktower feel like a village, he says, adding that the building was decrepit when he bought it, with dead pigeons and courtyards covered in tin. The lofts sold initially for an average of \$300,000 each.

Mr. Jacobsen initially contacted Mr. Holliday expressing concern that the conversion would erase the history of the building; the developer then hired Mr. Jacobsen to create an exhibit of the building's history—a series of displays that still line the walls of the building's third-floor hallway.

There are no units currently for sale. Reflecting the hot San Francisco real-estate market, an 862-square-foot, one-bedroom, one-bathroom unit sold in March for \$755,000, almost \$100,000 over the listing price. There were 10 offers, three of them cash, according to real-estate agent Alan Morcos, who handled the sale.

Mr. Marini, 41, the CEO of BranchOut, and his wife,

36-year-old managing editor of the San Francisco Chronicle, describes it.

Ms. Cooper and her husband, Kirk Seward, a 37-year-old medical-device inventor, paid \$1.2 million for their one-bedroom loft six years ago. They say they almost moved out after they had their son, Cole, last year, but decided to stay instead, intending to create a room for Cole out of the laundry room and coat closet off the front entryway. Ms. Cooper says they couldn't bear to leave.

"We wouldn't be able to find these kinds of friends again," she says.

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IN CHARACTER Rick and Naitry Marini's loft, above; palm trees in the courtyard add a tropical note, right.

