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pg. 17
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President's Message

It’s unlikely there is a more common thread from generation to generation than the delights of eating out. Or for that matter, a drink at the local watering hole. The Mill Valley of 2012 takes pride in its fine dining and upscale bars. Even the throwback of another era, the 2 a.m. Club, caters to the while collar as much as the blue collar working stiff from the past.

This year the Mill Valley Historical Society celebrates the town’s rich history of charm and personality. This year’s History Walk will be a downtown tour of 70 past and present restaurants and bars. History and anecdotes will be the focus, and we will also be privileged to enter the back stage of two of its finest and most historical establishments, the El Paseo House of Chops, and La Ginetra.

This Annual Review, the publication the Historical Society takes most pride in, focuses this year on the same subject as our History Walk. We look forward to seeing you at the Walk, Sunday, May 27, starting at the Outdoor Art Club. The 90-minute walks will begin at 9:30 a.m. and depart every 15 minutes until 3:30 p.m.

— Tim Amyx

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106 Throckmorton Avenue, Mill Valley
Miwoks to Margaritas — the Rollicking Saga of Mill Valley Food and Drink

By Matthew Stafford

The first diners and drinkers at the southern base of Mt. Tamalpais were the Huimen branch of the Coast Miwok, who arrived on the Marin peninsula more than 5,000 years ago. In good years the place could be a natural smorgasbord. In the springtime there might be clover, soap root, wild pea, wild honey, oak sap and miner’s lettuce, which was placed beside an ant hill so the little critters would march over it and exude their vinegar essence. Summer meant berries, wildflower seeds and grasses, and autumn was all about the nutritious, high-caloric acorn, the year-round mainstay of the local diet. Shelled, mashed and leached of its bitter tannins, the acorn meal was placed in a basket with water and heated rocks and cooked until soupy, then formed into cakes and baked in an underground oven or eaten as a kind of polenta. Meanwhile the men of the tribe were bringing home the venison, the elk and the seafood. Bow and arrow were employed on large game, but snares and basket traps were used to capture rabbits, turtles, squirrels, quail and woodpeckers. Along the marshlands were clams, mussels, oysters, ducks and geese ideal for harvesting, netting or shooting. Meat, fish and fowl alike were cooked over an open fire.

The white folk who started moving into today’s Mill Valley after California joined the Union weren’t nearly so proactive about their hunting and gathering. For most of the nineteenth century there was neither restaurant nor grocery store within miles of John Reed’s sawmill, and aside from the occasional blackberry or creek-fresh salmon, foodstuffs were shipped in from San Francisco and Sausalito. One place where you could get a good meal was at one of the resorts that started popping up on the hills and in the canyons in the 1870s: the Blithedale, the Madrona, the Eastland, the Bellvue, and the Monte Vista, where “the cuisine will have particular attention and will be provided with the best the market affords.”

After a spur line from the Northwestern Pacific Railroad was extended into the canyon in 1889 and streets were laid out and parcels auctioned a year later, the brand-new town of Eastland (aka Mill Valley) got down to the serious business of food and
drink. At first the citizenry (numbering 500 or so, double that weekends and holidays) still depended on peddlers who brought in produce from San Francisco to supplement the meat and dairy products readily available from local ranches. The most famous of these entrepreneurs was Suey Kee, who sold vegetables door to door from baskets suspended from a pole slung across his shoulders. (A few years later he opened a grocery/laundery at 41 Throckmorton that endured for six decades.)

The town’s first grocery stores opened in the mid-1890s: the Imperial, located on Miller Avenue on the site of today’s Vogue Cleaners, and Wheeler Martin’s Pioneer Market ("Choice family groceries at city prices") at Bernard and Throckmorton. Bernard and Throckmorton was also the first lot sold at the 1890 land auction, and it holds a special place in Mill Valley’s culinary history. In addition to serving as the town’s first post office (Martin was its first postmaster), the location hosted several different grocery stores over the next few decades, including the Tamalpais, the Allen & Roseveare and even one of the first Safeways. After Safeway moved to East Blithedale and Sunnyside in 1938, Osgood’s Tavern (formerly at 36 Miller) took over the space, kicking off a tradition of 106 Throckmorton good cheer that has alternately delighted and enraged residents for 75 years. (More on that later.)

The Tamalpais Land and Water Company owned the land at the end of the railroad line and proceeded to draw up lots and sell them, aiming for a bone dry community. Every parcel sold at the 1890 auction, including 106 (then 102) Throckmorton’s, came with a clause attached that prohibited the sale of hard liquor on the premises. TL&W also induced the county to ban booze sales within a quarter mile of the train depot at the center of town. Neither ban

Some 15 or 20 watering holes sprang up around the town, in back room establishments called “blind pigs,” in grocery stores, in hotels and restaurants.

The Louvre saloon, notorious for Jagtown brawls, was where Peck-Stanton-Hockett Insurance is now located on East Blithedale.

photo: M.V. Library History Room
worked. Some 15 or 20 watering holes sprang up around the town, in back room establishments called "blind pigs," in grocery stores, in hotels and restaurants. There was a watering hole for every 50 citizens. Also, the quarter-mile limit imposed by the county prompted the rise of Jagtown, the red-light district just past the quarter-mile post on East Blithedale. The Louvre at Blithedale and Grove Streets, famous for its brawls, chicken shoots and cockfights, was an especially popular Jagtown destination.

In 1894, with booze clearly not gone from the scene, the town fathers tried to get county supervisors to expand the no-booze zone past a quarter-mile. They failed on a 3-2 vote. Drinking continued unabated, mostly outside the quarter-mile zone but also within it. The action in Jagtown grew ever more boisterous. In 1895 several saloonkeepers were busted but got off easy. In 1897 drug stores opened in town and sold medicinal whiskey. Making matters worse, in February 1900 the Marin Superior Court issued a ruling that cast doubt on the quarter-mile limit.

The town fathers had had enough. In August 1900 they pushed through a vote of the residents to incorporate the new town, 99 yes, 63 no. Soon a tough anti-booze ordinance was passed. At first the only saloon to meet the stiff new rules was the Mill Valley Tavern, H. Frese, prop. In 1902 the Jagtown area was annexed, putting those notorious saloons under town rules they could not meet. They folded.

But all was not lost for the thirsty. Within a couple of years the town loosened up a bit: you could get a drink at Jack Brady's Sequoia Saloon (today it's the downtown branch of Wells Fargo Bank) or Landgraf's Villa next door, which had picnic grounds and a dance floor and was the only joint in town to serve women and children. Plus, the town limits stopped at what is now Montford, paving the way for establishments such as The Brown Jug and its successor, the 2 a.m. Club.

Meanwhile, Mill Valley's first restaurant opened just up Miller Avenue on the site of today's Mill Creek Plaza. Mill Valley House, built in 1891, was also one of the town's first hotels, and owners Jesse and Lotte Bundy were famous for their veal stew and fresh berry pies. The premises included an ice cream and lunch parlor as well. (At the Mill Valley Hotel, one of several competitors that would open over the next few years, you could order a hundred oysters for 50 cents.) More casual eateries included The Old Ranch at the mouth of Blithedale Canyon, featuring meals for 25 cents, and Bernard and Ethel Grethel's Eastland Bakery at 18 Miller Avenue.

Bakeries of a century ago did more than bake bread. The Modern Bakery to the left was also restaurant and ice cream parlor; the Eastland Bakery below made candy, served coffee and cashed checks. Both were on Miller near Throckmorton.
Marin’s sylvan seclusion made it a real and rollicking part of the Roaring Twenties. When the Eighteenth Amendment made the production, sale and transportation of alcohol illegal in 1920, bootleggers saw the county and its hidden coves and wooded hideaways as an ideal drop-off point for San Francisco-bound liquor. (Tennessee Cove was a favorite illicit rendezvous.) Domestic wine was another hot commodity. Under the Volstead Act, individuals were allowed to make and store up to 200 gallons of vino per year for their personal use, but a lot of the stuff brewed by Mill Valley’s Italian community was smuggled out of the cellar, onto the ferryboat and into San Francisco’s speakeasies. Moonshine, on the other hand, wasn’t legal at all, and the town’s intoxicant entrepreneurs had to make their whisky in densely vegetated hollows along the town’s creekbeds. The back room of Jimmy Quinn’s candy store was an especially popular place to shoot one back, as was the Tavern of Tamalpais, since it was nearly impossible for the feds to arrive at the top of the mountain unannounced without hopping the scenic railway. Greater Mill Valley’s primo speakeasy, though, was the Manzanita Inn (later the Fireside Inn), known for its amazing array of hooch and its monthly raids. The non-stop action inspired Federal Judge Partridge to order it closed for one year in November 1923. When owner George Moore protested the judge replied, “You might as well try to placate a pack of hungry wolves by throwing chocolate éclairs as to ask me to permit that place to operate as a hotel.”

Eposit’s Soda Fountain, established in 1920, launched 92 years (and counting) for 127 Throckmorton as a solid spot to whet your appetite.

Jimmy Quinn and the aforementioned Osgood’s Tavern both flourished after Prohibition was repealed in 1933. Quinn ran a popular if feisty saloon until 1975; Osgood retired in 1946 and sold the business to Fred Berick, who in 1948 renamed the place The Old Mill Tavern. Other enduring local landmarks included Eposit’s Soda Fountain at 127 Throckmorton, established 1920, which had a shower and changing rooms for hikers as well as sundaes and soda pop. Over its 44 years of existence the place expanded into a full-fledged restaurant, and in 1964 Sal and Maria Aversa purchased it and renamed it La Ginestra, after the scotch broom that flourishes on both Tamalpais and Vesuvio. It’s a popular dining option to this day.

The Aversa family took over the space in 1964 for La Ginestra and are still going strong as a local favorite (minus the ceiling fish nets, RIP).
El Paso, the brick-lined walkway connecting Throckmorton with Sunnyside, has hosted several boutique restaurants since it opened to foot traffic in 1941, most notably Mary Harkins' Popovers of the 1960s. Mack Staley opened his Sonapa Farms fish and poultry establishment in 1954; after five years he took over Suey Kee's nephew's grocery at 41 Throckmorton, converted it into a restaurant and served honest, tasty grub at reasonable prices for 36 years. (During its last two years of existence superstar chef Emile Waldteufel made it an improbable dining destination for the cognoscenti as well.) Stiveson's Restaurant, just up Throckmorton from the train/bus depot, became Pat & Joe's diner in the 1960s, a favorite late-night hangout of Marin's Age of Aquarius rock musicians despite (or because of) its frequent closures by the health department.

The rockers had a lot to do with Mill Valley's biggest barroom brouhaha since the Jactown days of the 1890s. In 1968 The Old Mill, which had had a piano bar for several years, started offering country music to its patrons. Rock was added to the bill within a few years and before long the locals were complaining about the noise level and what they referred to as an "undesirable element." Similar concerns were echoed up the street at 153 Throckmorton, where The Office, an old-time saloon turned cocktail lounge, had metamorphosed into the totally seventies brass-and-cedarwood Sweetwater nightclub in 1972. (An early-days on the premises stabbing didn't help matters.) The issue was skirted when the City Council allowed the two nightspots to play live music if it was PA-enhanced acoustic - musicians could use microphones but not plug in keyboards or guitars to speakers. The Old Mill routinely ignored the ban with the likes of the young Huey Lewis and Queen Ida and Her Bon Temps Zydeco Band, and in 1979 the council banned live entertainment throughout

The basement of the old Sweetwater served as Green Room and party central for the legendary musicians and followers who hung out there. When the action escalated it riled up nearby residents and business owners.

photo: Suki Hill

8 2012 MILL VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY REVIEW
Mill Valley except along Highway 101 and in Blithedale Plaza. On November 26, 1981, The Old Mill served its last drink (to local legend Dan Hicks) and offered its last game of pool (played by the equally legendary Charlie Deal).

The Sweetwater, opened in 1972 by Fred Martin, fared better. A year after Martin sold his stock to Jay and Jennie Patterson in 1979, the council reversed its earlier decision and permitted amped music on the premises three nights a week; within a decade the place was a magnet for some of the greatest acts in music. What had been The Old Mill at 106 Throckmorton went on to host a succession of restaurants, some successful, some not: O’Leary’s, Bistro! Bistro!, Annabelle’s, The Frog and the Peach, Vasco (the current occupant).

Such culinary evolutions and boggings are common among Mill Valley’s eateries. The aforementioned Mill Valley House, later Old Brown’s Store, later Mill Creek Plaza, has hosted everything from Aunt Bessie’s to Jennie Low’s to the town’s latest hotspot, the Balboa Café. What’s now the Mill Valley Market liquor department saw earlier life as a string of restaurants, including The White Mill, a French place named Jacques, The Redwoods, and Paprika, a dearly missed Viennese dining spot. An East Blithedale gas station turned into a copy shop, then the hopping Avenue Grill for 17 years, then the underappreciated Mudbugs, then the Cascade Bar & Grill and finally today’s perpetually packed Bungalow 44.

Davood’s, home of lush Middle Eastern fare and dreamy walnut pie, couldn’t get a liquor license and became Piazza D’Angelo, which could.
The best burger in town was served at The Palate at 163 Throckmorton. A few years later it became La Veranda, a tranquil Italian restaurant overlooking Old Mill Creek. Then it burned to the ground along with adjacent Dowd’s Moving and Storage, the town’s oldest business. The Arts and Crafts home at 24 Sunnyside is a story unto itself (including its early-seventies incarnation, the Be Here Now Café). And let’s not forget the transformation of Lady Baltimore Bakery into the iconic Pearl’s Phat Burgers, all at 8 East Blithedale Avenue.

The house of seven cuisines

By Chuck Oldenburg

The former boarding house at 24 Sunnyside does not have seven gables, but over the last four decades, a series of ten short lived restaurants have been based on seven different kinds of food: American, Mexican, Continental, Italian, Thai, Asian Fusion, and Japanese.

The first restaurant was established in 1973 and nine more followed.

Sidney G. Woodyatt Restaurant 1973

Be Here Now Café 1974-1975

Don Pancho’s Mexican Restaurant 1975-1982

The Cottage 1983

Ristorante Lucca 1984-1996

Toi Thai Restaurant 1996-2002

First Crush Restaurant & Bar 2003-2005

Mi Casa Restaurant 2005-2006

Ora Restaurant Bar & Lounge 2006-2008

Tsukiji Sushi Bar and Restaurant 2009-2012

The latest restaurant, Tsukiji, closed in February. Will Tyler Florence come to the rescue as he did with Hawk’s Tavern and El Paseo House of Chops? Keep an eye on 24 Sunnyside.

The history of food and drink in the little town at the foot of Mt. Tamalpais may not be as distinctive as the cuisine of Firenze or New Orleans or San Francisco, but the locals have never suffered from lack of abundance. From acorn-grinding Miwoks to the martini-slurpers of Bungalow 44, Mill Valley’s sippers and noshers have had plenty of options to keep tongue tantalized, belly satisfied and spirits replenished. □
It's Time to Hoist a Few With Jimmy Quinn

By Steve McNamara

On the roster of great Mill Valley saloonkeepers, one name stands out: James Francis Quinn. Whether measured by sheer ornerness, personal alcohol consumption, devotion to good friends or the source of great stories, Jimmy Quinn leads the list.

The cantankerous little Irishman ran his saloon for 46 years and died at age 89, nine months after the last drink was poured on St. Patrick's Day in 1975. Quinn's was located at what is now the deli department of the Mill Valley Market. When Quinn first set up shop in 1929, moving there from South-of-Market in San Francisco, the place was a candy store to which he added bootleg booze sold out the back. After Prohibition ended in 1933, the veil was dropped.

A large sign outside read, oddly: "Meet the Quinn's." Why the possessive apostrophe? Was it the sign-maker's mistake? But if so, why the plural "s"? Jimmy's wife Mae did the books and wrote the checks but played no other role at Quinn's. There was only one Quinn, Jimmy, holding forth. Ah well, 'tis a mystery.

What's not a mystery was the saloon's position in Mill Valley civic/drinking affairs, being as it was next door to City Hall, the fire station and the police station of the time. When the city council adjourned its meetings, council and staff repaired to Quinn's - this in a time before the Brown Act forbade such gatherings. Cops at the end of their shifts would stop by. Firemen, too. Jimmy held Badge No. 1 in the Mill Valley Volunteer Fire Department, was granted lifetime membership and was a fixture at the Fireman's Ball.

Our expert on such matters is Jim Howe, now a resident of Mt. Shasta but for 38 years until 1995 an all-purpose employee of the Mill Valley Market. Jim's father, Harold, was a bartender at Quinn's so Jim combines the insights of a daytime neighbor, nighttime patron and family connection.

Dean Meyer, city councilman and then mayor, 1968-70, remembers that for council members, "After all the yammering at meetings, it was a relief to get over to Quinn's and relax." Jim Howe notes: "The council liked to go there and talk things over in a civilized way. It's been said that more decisions about city government were made in that bar than all the council meetings put together. Cops would put a jacket over their uniform and come in to have their medication before they went home, even if they got off at 1 o'clock in the morning."

When did Quinn's close at night? "All the bars in Mill Valley used to open at 6 in the morning, and close at 2 in the morning," says Howe. "Very often there would be a line in the morning, waiting for somebody to come unlock the door." Just at Quinn's? "No, outside The Old Mill Tavern, too."

At the time there were four community watering holes: Quinn's, The Old Mill Tavern at what is now Vasco, The Office at what became The Sweetwater and is now Oska women's clothing, and the ever-present 2 a.m. Club at Miller and Montford (called The Brown Jug for a while). Quinn owned all three of the downtown bars, at one time or another, and Howe can tell you how the four stood in the society of drinkers:

Quinn's had the city government people plus regular Mill Valley. - "The people who raised me."
They fixed it up; although Quinn made a big impression, "He and among as a single Quinn." Patrons on the liver. The Old going to decor: The wall. 2nd Dec or: to hucks crowd. procla. i med: "Our plus l.he side fought Quinn's Howes." I f tale and Dad, a.m. [he cabbage V's. Up; for your Qub. ArtiTUde Go lden came from The re the was kind every day proof, ev ery day signers. Tn e dogs playing poker. Plu s for your room. Th t: the guy, "That's 20 bucks." Drinks were 50 cents apiece then. And the guy says, "Twenty bucks! For two goddamn drinks you want twenty bucks?" And Jimmy says, "You said buy the house a drink!" The guy says, "I said buy the HOWES a drink!" Quinn threw him out. He 86ed the guy permanently and kicked everybody out, including my dad and myself. He locked the door and sat there and drank alone. So me and my dad go over to The Old Mill. We walk in the door and the bartender shouts out, "Buy the Howes a drink!" The story had got there already.

"Then another time me and some friends went out at night to a lake near Nicasio and got us a bunch of big Tennessee bullfrogs. We were aiming to have frog's legs for dinner the next night. We stopped by Quinn's and had a few. My dad was tending bar and he says, 'Leave the frogs here. I'll clean 'em.' Well, when he closed up he forgot about the frogs. That night the sack came open. My dad said if he'd had a thousand dollars he'd have paid it to see the look on Quinn's face when he opened the door the next morning and saw those big bullfrogs jumping all over the place, from one side of the bar to the other."

On that note, let us raise a glass to James Francis Quinn, a legend in his time and ours, a true exemplar among practitioners of the noble art of keeping a saloon. □
In 1936, Edna Foster, a community activist in her day, would leave meetings at the Outdoor Art Club and view with disgust the ramshackle three-story Holturn Building across the street at 15 Throckmorton. She and her husband, Henry, who was manager of the Parker Pen Office in San Francisco, purchased the building. She vowed to make some improvements.

ARGHITECTURE
One day a friend drove her to see a uniquely designed brick building near the railroad tracks in San Rafael - it later became La Petite Auberge Restaurant. She was told that the building had recently been remodeled. She decided, "I want the same person who remodeled this building to remodel mine." The person turned out to be Gus Costigan, a dashing, artistic, temperamental young man who built his first house when he was 18.

For a time, Gus lived in the "ugly old building" he was remodeling, then later he moved to the Foster's spacious home on Hillside Avenue. After the Holturn Building was partly done, Edna and Henry bought the lot behind it on Sunnyside Avenue, a dead-end street blocked by the railroad. A three-room cottage and woodshed were on the lot. Edna and Gus envisioned a complex of buildings, courts and gardens on either side of the passageway running from Throckmorton to Sunnyside. The name, El Paseo, was accepted by the City Council as a street and building complex. Designing the complex took several years. During World War II, Gus was building bridges and other war-related structures with the army Combat Engineers in the African and Italian campaigns. Gus often worked by candle light on plans for El Paseo. Meanwhile, at home, Edna’s favorite recreation was working on the plans.

CONSTRUCTION
After Gus returned, he and Edna searched for building materials with an antique look. They acquired old adobe from Mexico, huge beams from an old building being torn down at Fort Cronkite, railroad ties and spikes from the mountain railroad and hand made tiles and wrought iron fixtures from the Guatemala Building at the World’s Fair on Treasure island. Gus hand carved beams and balustrades, inlaid ornamental tiles and plaques and in some doors inserted bottoms of champagne bottles to give a stained glass effect. He also carved the rustic signs that were to become his trademark. Shops and studios had old brick and heavy timbers with windows divided into little squares and heavy doors with hammered iron hinges. The middle part of the complex had two stories with studio apartments upstairs. The building was opened with a fiesta on May 15, 1948.

TEENANTS
The Fosters wanted very special tenants who would appreciate and enhance El Paseo - and they got them. People who lived and worked there during the first 30 years included the following: Herman Hein, celebrated landscape architect; Ethel Harding, pianist and teacher; Alyn Strened, illustrator of books; Charles Durre, interior decorator; Sam and Sylvia Newsom who specialized in bonsai and oriental art objects; Nevin Kemphorne, famous artist and teacher; Eileen Bolanz, creator of hand made leather goods; Arlen Blake, photographer and portrait painter; Phil Planert, photographer and Alan Blanford who carried art goods from all over the world in her Unusual Shop. More prosaic businesses included Gene Heide’s El Paseo Reality; Andre’s Beauty Salon; John Finn’s Accounting; and Verne Hockett’s Insurance offices. At various times there were offices of lawyers and doctors. The Christian Science Reading Room and Nora Zimmerman’s Mill Valley Health Foods were longtime occupants of the two stores facing Throckmorton Avenue.
EL PASEO RESTAURANT

Upon entering the complex from Throckmorton Avenue, the first stop on the right is El Paseo Restaurant, which has been open continuously since 1947 under various managements. The first owners were Mildred Snell and Amy Hanson. Other short-term owners followed.

In 1957, Mary Harkins took over El Paseo Restaurant serving Continental cuisine. She also had Frozen Poppers available in Bay Area Supermarkets. Her restaurant was noted for its fine food and old world European atmosphere. Her vivid, colorful personality and the fine food made the restaurant the very heart of El Paseo for fifteen years.

In 1972, Mark Hottmeyer and Gunter Kollner—had both worked in food service on trans-Atlantic Hamburg American Line ships—opened the restaurant serving French cuisine. Added a wine bar in 1985. Continued to expand into areas formerly occupied by various shops. Closed for four months in 1995 for seismic retrofitting. After 33 years of managing a successful restaurant, they retired in 2005.

On June 1, 2006, Keiko Takahashi and her husband Seigo Takei opened a more expensive French restaurant. She is a famous chef and he is a wine connoisseur. Their restaurant earned a Michelin star. It closed on October 7, 2009, ending an era of French and Continental restaurants that had lasted 52 years.

Celebrity chef and Food Network star Tyler Florence returned to Mill Valley with his wife Tolan, a Mill Valley native. He opened a small chain of luxury kitchen supply stores in northern California, one of which is at 59 Throckmorton. He also opened two restaurants, the Wayfarer Tavern in San Francisco and Rotisserie & Wine in Napa. Then in 2011 he opened El Paseo House of Chops in partnership with Sammy Hagar, a rock singer, guitarist and songwriter with many other business interests. A second Mill Valley restaurant, Hawk’s Tavern on Miller, followed not long after.

Restaurants at One El Paseo Lane

Fondue Pot II – 1971-1974
Uncle Gaylord’s Ice Cream – 1976-1981
Dipsea Café – 1986-1996
Moved to 200 Shoreline, still in business.

EL PASEO TODAY

The three-story building on Throckmorton has two stores at street level. In #11 is Material Grace – Textiles and Ceramics for Body, Home and Spirit. It has a side entrance on the passageway. The space at #15 is shared by Gallery Fifteen, Denis McNicoll, Painter, and The Madison Co. Realtors. There are 12 apartments on the second and third stories. On Sunnyside, Moss & Moss Antiques et Cetera is at One El Paseo Lane, and Moss & Daughters, a gift shop, is at Two El Paseo Lane. Both boutiques have an ownership connection with Tolan Florence, wife of Tyler Florence.

El Paseo House of Chops occupies the rest of the space: the original restaurant, the shops designed for other tenants, the upstairs studio apartments now used as business offices, and the courtyards for outdoor dining.

30 Years or More in Mill Valley

★ Gold List ★
(Same name, same place)
- 2 a.m. Club
- Buckeye Roadhouse
- El Paseo
- La Ginestra
- Mill Valley Coffee Shop
- Shoreline Café

★ Silver List ★
(Different place or different name)
- Mama’s Royal Café
- Sweetwater
- Burger Chef/Der Weinerschnitzel/Gira Puli
- Davood’s/Piazza D’Angelo
- Kim’s/Jo’s Taco Lounge
- Osgood’s Tavern/The Old Mill Tavern/ O’Leary’s/Bistrot Bistro/Anabelle’s/
  The Frog and the Peach/Vasco
- Nick’s Donut Shop/Imberjack
- Sonoma Farms/Sonoma Bistro/
  Noah’s Bagels/Champagne
- Stefano’s Pizza/Pearl’s Phat Burgers
- Tsukiji (24 Sunnyside, 10 restaurants)
The 2 a.m. Club is the last raucous survivor of Mill Valley’s once-proud, practically extinct boozing heritage. As recently as half a century ago the questing merrymaker could sample the hooch at the Old Mill, the Office and Quinn’s downtown, at the Fireside out towards 101, at the Brothers (the scariest of them all) tucked up Locust Avenue, or, just around the corner, at the Deuce, the cognoscenti’s nickname for the 2 a.m., where the neighborhood’s blue-collar citizenry would while away an afternoon feeding nickels into the jukebox, shooting some stick, bathing in the glow of the cathode-ray TV tube and nibbling at the edges of a restorative whiskey. Over the years the blue collars have dwindled and the jukebox is as nickel-friendly as a parking meter, but otherwise the Deuce survives, its mission, stature and spirit intact.

The place dates back to the busy post-earthquake months of 1906, a few years after Mill Valley’s Town Trustees had successfully turned their once exuberant little village into a dry and proper place to raise a family. Happily, it was still possible to quench a thirst outside the city limits, and unincorporated Homestead Valley — aka anything west of Miller Avenue — was a popular destination. It was here that pioneer entrepreneur Bill Brown (later the impresario behind Brown’s Hall at Miller and Evergreen) opened The Brown Jug, an imbibing establishment that thrived until Prohibition settled upon the land in 1920.

For the following 13 years those in the know could still get a nip at the speakeasy up the hill at Ethel and Montford, but it was a happy day when Prohibition was repealed in 1933 and Joe Hornsby reopened the Jug in a shuttered grain and feed store at the Deuce’s current location. In 1939 he cocked a snot at Mill Valley proper’s 10 p.m. closing time and renamed the place the 2 a.m. Club, making late-night drinking safe for those unwilling or unable to make the trek to wicked Sausalito. (The distinction became moot 12 years later when the city, salivating over all that potential sales-tax revenue, acquired the west side of Miller between Reed and Montford under something called the Annexation of Uninhabited Territory Act of 1939.) The following year the bar was purchased by Louis Geyerbiehl and his sons Bill and Breslin; Bill ended up owning the place for 39 years.

In 1905 this group builds a wooden sidewalk along Montford from Miller, where the 2 a.m. Club is today. They look like they could use a drink.

photo: M.V. Library History Room
Over the next few decades the Deuce became a regular neighborhood institution, a gathering place for the locals, most of them good union working stiffs, to meet and quaff and shake the dice under Greiberichl’s beneficent gaze. He sold the joint to Rich Marros and “Goose” Goortherts in 1979, and despite a wicked rumor that they were going to convert the place into a roller disco, that old-town Homestead vibe endured. The Olympia was still on tap, the same old coots perched at the end of the bar by the windows, and even Huey Lewis’ 1983 megahit LP Sports, with its cool cover shot of the band relaxing under Charlie Deal’s toilet seat guitar (the saloon’s signature tchotchke), couldn’t overwhelm the vintage vibe. (When Lewis appeared on Late Night with David Letterman, Dave noted that the bar looked like a pretty sleazy place, thereby bestowing global cred upon Mill Valley’s favorite watering hole.)

Reflecting Mill Valley’s upscaling demographic, in recent years the Deuce has attracted its share of yuppies, slummers and wannabe hipsters (Sean Penn is an occasional presence, and an up-and-coming LA rock band named themselves after their favorite saloon in 2007). But after longtime owners Dirk Payne and Steve Powels sold the place to staff bartenders Amanda Solloway and Dave Marshall in June 2010, the couple installed new floors and lighting, remodeled the bathrooms and threw in a new coat of paint, and today’s Deuce is more like the old Deuce than it’s been in a long time: fireplace and pool table at the ready, ancient memorabilia adorning the back bar, signature red-and-white neon sign beckoning friends and neighbors within. Wander in and take a sip of genuine Mill Valley history.
How the Golden Gate Bridge Changed Mill Valley

By Linda Xiques

Over the decades, several major occurrences shifted Mill Valley’s bucolic path in a new direction: the 1929 fire, the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge, the Second World War, the hippie invasion, the increase in affluence. But of these, it was the bridge that brought about the most change. Indeed, the latter shifts couldn’t have happened without the bridge. The Golden Gate Bridge opened up Mill Valley and new residents, new jobs and new ideas poured in.

Opening Day, May 27, 1937
photo: Courtesy Golden Gate National Park Conservancy
The '20s and early '30s saw change too, of course. Automobiles became common and Sunday traffic jams along Camino Alto stretched all the way to Corte Madera as weekend travelers inched their way to Sausalito to catch the ferry. In 1931, a drawbridge over Richardson Bay - touted as the largest redwood structure ever built - opened to great fanfare and helped ease the Sunday gridlock along Mill Valley's northern region.

But that celebration didn't compare with the elation that greeted the Golden Gate Bridge on opening day, May 27, 1937. It was "pedestrians only" the first day; auto traffic commenced on May 28.

Though no cars were allowed on the bridge that first day, there was one vehicular accident. According to the SF Chronicle, a highway patrol officer accidentally rammed his motorcycle into a hotdog stand on the approach to the bridge. Reportedly, mustard and wiener flew in every direction! Impromptu hot dog stands had sprung up to serve the walkers and an estimated 50,000 hot dogs were consumed by famished pedestrians on opening day.

From that day forward, change accelerated. It's easy to imagine Sunday drivers jaunting across the bridge for the first time, liking what they saw and deciding to relocate. The Golden Gate International Exposition of 1939-40 also increased public awareness. From Treasure Island, the site of the Exposition, the rolling hills of Marin were clearly visible, tempting exploitation. Exhibits about the wine and dairy industries, the resources and recreation opportunities that lay just north of the bridge piqued the interest of visitors from all over the U.S - and indeed the world.

Mill Valley had long been a magnet for visitors seeking recreation, but the burning of the cog railway in the fire of 1929, followed closely by the Great Depression, crippled local tourism. In 1931, the train tracks that wound up Mt. Tam were dismantled. The easy access provided by the Golden Gate Bridge spelled the end of commuting by rail and ferry. By October 1940, Mill Valley commuters were catching Greyhound buses out of the old train depot.

The war years brought rapid change to Mill Valley. The population rose 51 percent (to 7,331) between 1940 and 1950. The business district began creeping down Miller Avenue and the thriving Locust shopping area had its own merchants association. In 1948, 200 new parking meters were installed downtown. By 1950, the Mill Valley Chamber of Commerce directory listed six car dealers, nine auto repair shops, 18 contractors associated with construction, plumbing, electrical wiring and concrete work, as well as 10 realtors. Families were served by five schools, seven churches, eight grocery...
According to Goheen, folks at the Bank of America suggested Sycamore Avenue known as Sycamore Village — or sought him out. From and Duesenberg automobiles for a while, becoming crew imported down Los Angeles hoping to Twenty thousand Marinship lalxh Tetis and locate a Marin was going full blast on youth, he'd bounced around from one job sales.~ jusc beyond Blithdale Avenue. Coheen recalled, “At that time there was no 'spec' housing being built in Marin and very little in San Francisco. But L.A. was going full blast on spec housing.” Wanting to explore this new spec biz, he and J.H. Scott, a friend and neighbor, moseyed down to Los Angeles hoping to “pick up a hotshot builder, have him make some plans, and start building here.” With a work crew imported from L.A., Goheen built 12 houses on his lots just beyond Blithdale Avenue in lower Mill Valley. They sold for $6000 each in 1938, with a $350 down payment.

Gaining a reputation as a cost-conscious builder, Goheen began getting orders for custom homes from individuals who sought him out. From 1938-40, he had 40 custom homes under construction in various parts of Marin.

According to Goheen, folks at the Bank of America suggested he think about building “defense housing” in Mill Valley and offered to arrange financing so he could start a mass of homes at one time. Additional property he'd purchased in the lower part Mill Valley encompassed a small hill and a marsh that stretched to the other side of Sycamore Avenue. Goheen scraped down the hill to fill the marsh and started building in 1940. Eventually he completed 351 houses in the Sycamore area and 75 in Alto.

When the Sycamore project commenced, Goheen recalled, a town councilman stood up in a meeting and said to his fellow council members, “I knew you guys would rue the day you ever paved the streets in this town!” “They didn't want anyone else to come into Mill Valley,” said Goheen. “That’s been the basic thought in this county since I’ve been here.”

The War Production Board encouraged Goheen to build defense housing in Mill Valley but kept a tight rein on the start-up project. Goheen described the first 100 homes as good, solid little houses with fireplaces and yards. But they had no heating systems or showerheads because the feds considered that a waste of metal. "Some one back in Washington made the decision," said Goheen. "California? They don’t need heat in California!"

The War Production Board initially wanted the houses to be rented, not sold. Goheen said he fought that decision mightily. He and Neil Schulz, who was also building in the area, feared that after the war, the place would turn into “a ghost town” and they’d be stuck with rentals they couldn’t afford. The small, unheated houses sold for $4,500, each yielding $400 in profit for the builder. Goheen figured that the buyers who installed heating systems later probably paid three times what it would have cost him to install heat from the get-go.

Goheen continued building homes elsewhere after the war. In 1952, he got a chance to buy the old Freitas Ranch and he renamed it Terra Linda, though other builders were involved in its development.

But that, as he said in 1979, was another story. A story of change and transformation throughout Marin following the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge.  

George Goheen with his plans for remaking southern Mill Valley, which he did.

The experts in Washington thought furnace heat was not needed.
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