



ABOVE SAN FRANCISCO

ROBERT CAMERON AND ARTHUR HOPPE

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by
ROBERT CAMERON

*A New Collection of Historical and
Original Aerial Photographs*

CAMERON and COMPANY SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA



Fireworks emblazon the sky to celebrate the 50th anniversaries of the city's two great bridges. On the right is the Bay Bridge, opened in 1936, and on the left the Golden Gate Bridge, which linked Marin to the City just a year later. You can see the lights of the pleasure boats that dotted the Bay for a close-up look at the pyrotechnics.







Herb Caen's Baghdad-by-the-Bay, carved from some fragile alabaster, basks for a magical moment under a cloud-puffed sky.

(opposite) From high above the East Bay, the salt flats carve an abstract art work worthy of a Thiebaud or a Diebenkorn.

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INTRODUCTION by ARTHUR HOPPE

San Francisco! "The most attractive, most civilized, most desirable city in the country." Holiday magazine rhapsodized more than a quarter of a century ago, "Nobody else's town is quite so beautiful or cosmopolitan or delightfully giddy."

We San Franciscans are accustomed to being slathered with such praise, but it is good to have it confirmed in the lyric photographs by Robert Cameron that follow. The blessings of nature not only define where we live but how we live. Rome has hills, London has fog, Hong Kong has a bay, but here we relish all of these. Unlike those bustling metropolises, the living is easy. We have no snow to shovel, no heat that swelters. The good little restaurant is just down the block, the verdant park is around the corner, the theater, the opera, the symphony are all quite worthy. And in New York or Hartford or Peoria people rarely stop to look at the view.

Our symbol has become that rolling tourist attraction, the cable car, and rightly so. For as they glide along at a stately twelve miles an hour, bells gaily ringing, they set both the city's tone and pace. This is a branch office town. The talented young man in the huge corporation works his way up to become branch manager. "Great news, George," says the head office back east. "We've been watching your work, and the job of assistant associate vice president here in New York (or Hartford or Peoria) is yours. You may well be top dog some day."

The young man with get-up-and-go gets up and is gone. He packs up his reluctant family and heads determinably east to shovel and swelter and get run over by pedestrians because he burns with ambition. Others, however, reject the bitch goddess and remain in this cool, gray city because they love their lives. The New Yorker looks down on us as hopeless losers. We however, prefer to think of ourselves as wise philosophers. They, like the Germans, live to work. We, like the French, work to live.

And we live in an enclave unlike any other. It is a peninsula seven miles square bursting with hills and sweeping vistas. We like to say our little world is bounded on three sides by water and on the fourth by reality. We are rich in both diversity and perversity. When friends from Washington ask with deep frowns what is going on in California politics, I can only shrug and reply, "How do I know? I live in San Francisco."

When the California electorate votes overwhelmingly in favor of such fashionable issues as banning affirmative action or cracking down on illegal aliens, we are alone on the other side of the chasm. The causes that unify us are (1) dividing California in half and (2) making San Francisco an independent city state. We strongly support both impossibilities.

Our independence is in our blood. We are the heirs of adventurous Spanish soldiers, roistering '49ers, tough sea captains and flinty bonanza

kings. For more than a century, our population has swelled with Asians who crossed the vast ocean, with pioneers who trudged across the endless plains and by Latinos who climbed the border fences – all of them driven to improve their lives.

Yet now that we've arrived – some of us generations ago – we are no longer in a hurry because we're not going anywhere. We are contented where we are. Easterners have accused us of being smug, and rightly so. We have much to be smug about. We are, the pollsters tell us, "America's favorite city." We are a Mecca for tourists, and they have become our leading industry. They crowd us off our cable cars and take our favorite tables in our restaurants, but we treasure them, for each is silent testimony to the desirability of living where we live.

So we smile at their blue knees when they insist on wearing shorts in the summertime. And when there's a chance, we delight in quoting them a remark wrongly attributed to Mark Twain: "The coldest winter I ever spent was one summer in San Francisco."

But that's hyperbole. It's never really cold here; it's cool. Our cool, rainy winters are succeeded by our cool, foggy summers – an equitable climate, we say. No hurricanes uproot our trees, no tornadoes rip away our roofs, no floods inundate our hills.

But nature is rarely all-forgiving, nor has she exempted San Francisco from her wrath. As the second millennium draws to a close, two monstrous tectonic plates are grinding inexorably beneath this city of hubris toward an inevitable upheaval. My father survived the earthquake of 1906. I have seen two damaging temblors in my lifetime. But this, say the seismologists, will be what the media calls "The Big One."

We seldom think about it. We rarely talk about it. Like the villagers on the slopes of Mt. Etna, we pursue our leisurely lives and shrug at the prospect of disaster. When it hits, we will rebuild our city as we have done before, we confidently say, and resume our halcyon pace.

Yet this unspoken catastrophe to come gives San Francisco an ephemeral air. There is an impermanence to all that's on this uneasy earth over which we so lightly tread. We live, if you will, in another Camelot.

For more than a century, writers and poets have tried desperately to grasp this elusive Camelot. It is, perhaps, more a quest for a photographer. Surely its God-given beauty has never been more thoroughly captured than in these exquisite photographs by Robert Cameron. From his helicopter soaring over this idyllic setting, Bob Cameron has looked down with a God-like eye and recorded with his camera what God sees. He has recorded it for you, gentle reader, and for generations yet to come. Here, in these pages, is proof that, yes, once there was a Camelot.



THE BAY AND BRIDGES



The Golden Gate Bridge plunges out of the fog to attack Fort Baker (*opposite*). This is one of a series of forts that have been defending the entrance to the Bay since 1850 from an enemy who never came. Today, the Fort is part of the vast park lands known as The Golden Gate National Recreation Area.



The summer fog erupts into a miniature Mount Fujiyama off the Berkeley shore. In the foreground is the eastern portion of the Bay Bridge, damaged in the Loma Prieta earthquake. It is being replaced by a parallel span. (*opposite*) The fog cuddles up to the north tower of the Golden Gate Bridge.







The tide swirls around the south tower of the Golden Gate Bridge as a sailboat beats to windward far below.



The Bay Bridge.

A fish-eye camera puts the Bay Area where it belongs – on top of the world.



