

Colors OF THE CASTRO

The best of the city's proudest neighborhood

BY LAUREN HAUPTMAN

The intersection of Castro and Market streets

If you're thinking about skipping the Castro because you think you don't belong, think again. While the neighborhood is known as the "gay mecca," it is also one of San Francisco's true gems, with something to offer absolutely everyone.

June is Gay Pride month, but here the rainbow flags fly year-round. Follow them all the way up Market Street until you reach what is probably the biggest rainbow flag you'll ever see. You will have found **Harvey Milk Plaza**, which is also, conveniently, the Castro Street Muni stop (at the southwest corner of Castro and Market streets).

The Castro is one of the city's most accessible neighborhoods, with the Muni underground lines K, L, M, and T, as well as the fabulous F-line street cars, all going right to it from downtown. Many buses also converge there from other neighborhoods. The only thing you don't want to do is drive, as parking can be a nightmare.

That giant rainbow flag, the symbol of gay pride everywhere, flies over the plaza named for "the Mayor of Castro Street," Harvey Milk. California's first openly gay elected official, Milk was elected to the board of supervisors (San Francisco's city council) in 1977 and was assassinated, along with then-Mayor George Moscone, less than a year later by homophobic fellow Supervisor Dan White.

No visit to the Castro would be complete without a stop by **575 Market St.** (now a commercial building), where Milk ran his camera shop in the front and his political headquarters in the back. There is a commemorative plaque on the sidewalk, and rumor has it that the ashes of Milk and his dog reside underneath.

If you want a history lesson on the Castro's evolution from its days as Most Holy Redeemer Parish (not kidding), consider booking yourself on the two-hour **Cruisin' the Castro** tour. Owner Kathy Amendola has a real love for the Castro; she will guide you through the history of not only the neighborhood, but of gay culture as well. The tour is definitely "sex-positive," and in addition to learning things even locals don't know, you are bound to make lovely new friends from near and far.

Choices abound in the Castro. You can find virtually every kind of food for every size wallet. If you've got a craving, there's an eatery for you. Likewise, the dazzling array of shops caters to anyone and everyone, from the mom of six from Omaha, to your macho nephew in Alabama, to your sister's girlfriend in Park Slope. There are also some impressive landmarks in the neighborhood, sure to please the historians and gawkers in your group.



Harvey Milk Plaza



An F-line street car



Castro Theatre



Fresh-baked at Hot Cookie

HEAD SOUTH

The heart of the Castro is a four-block drag (pun intended), along Market Street, from Sanchez to Castro streets, and along Castro Street from Market to 19th streets.

Starting south along Castro from Market, fortify yourself with a treat from **Hot Cookie**. Try toffee-milk-chocolate, mocha-cayenne-chip, or classic chocolate-chip. If you're feeling more adventurous, the chocolate-covered coconut-macaroon penis on a stick is quite satisfying. And, for just \$12, you can take home some Hot Cookie underwear for your cousin Tim.

Don't miss the **Castro Theatre**, built in 1922 and designated San Francisco's 100th registered landmark in 1977. The Spanish

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GO HERE



Cliff's Variety



Pooch politics at Best in Show



Under One Roof

staff says. Wig-trying-on has become so popular that they've imposed a limit of three per person. Choose wisely, then snap some photos to send to Uncle Bert.

It will be obvious that the Castro is an extremely pet-friendly neighborhood. Not only will your pooch be welcome in most stores, but they'll have treats on hand to make him or her happy. One of the neighborhood's newest shops is the **Best in Show** pet boutique. Political toys are favorites here, with President Bush and Gov. Schwarzenegger chew toys flying off the shelves and back to furry friends left at home. They also offer pet sitting and dog-walking if you've brought your best little friend along on your trip.

Next door is a San Francisco shopping highlight: **Under One Roof**. It is one of the city's best gift shops and successful nonprofit organizations. UOR gives 100 percent of its profits to local AIDS service organizations—more than 3.5 million since 1990. Let's review: You support an extremely worthy cause by shopping; the more you spend, the more you give. Let's call it Heaven. You can easily find a gift for your 8-year-old niece: Try "Hey, Thanks: Thank You Card Kit for Kids" — it's never too soon to instill manners. How about any of the huge collection of fancy candles for Aunt Irma? Perhaps a Last Supper lunch box or a fuzzy pink Buddha bank for your buds back home. It's worth planning your visit around the store's Disco Happy Hour, every Friday from 5-8 pm: complimentary beverages and snacks, everyone's favorite music (replete with mirrored ball), and shopping. Heaven.

More shopping for a cause is waiting at the **Human Rights Campaign Action Center and Store**. One of the United States' most prominent gay rights' organizations, HRC put its only West Coast store right where it belongs. Grab Castro souvenirs, great T-shirts, and a free guide that compares the GLBT supportiveness of *Fortune* 500 companies. Fifty-five per-

cent of the proceeds go back to HRC. As store manager Kirk Bonin describes it, "We're trying to have the kind of relevance to the Castro that Harvey's camera shop once had: part retail, part political action."

HEAD EAST

Go back to Harvey Milk Plaza, veer to the left, to the northwest corner of 17th and Market, and you'll find the **Pink Triangle Park and Memorial**. Dedicated in 2003, the small park memorializes GLBT people killed in the Holocaust; they were made to wear pink (men) or black (women) triangles on their clothes so the Nazis could identify them. Joining the ground-level triangle filled with pink rose quartz are 15 vertical granite triangles to represent the 15,000 people who were persecuted, imprisoned, or murdered.

Heading east on Market, be sure to gaze lovingly at the amazing windows at **IXIA**. The installations are works of art, and the botanists here create one-of-a-kind floral arrangements;

Cathedral-style exterior houses an amazing amalgamation of design periods and styles; the ceiling is dazzling, but not more so than the rising Wurlitzer pipe organ played before each 7 pm performance (as well as the 9 pm performance on Friday and Saturday). The theater hosts various film festivals (including the **San Francisco International LGBT Film Festival**, June 14-24, see page 45 for more information), as well as various sing-alongs ("Sing-Along Grease" runs June 8-13; see you there).

The venerable **Cliff's Variety** opened in 1936 and is a San Francisco institution. One of the best-stocked hardware stores in the city, Cliff's offers everything from gaskets to vacuum cleaners to mardi-gras beads. The staff is quite knowledgeable, so don't be afraid to ask for help. But be specific. If you ask for a blow torch, they're likely to ask, "Welding or brulee?"

Cliff's annex next door caters to the more decorous, with fabric, furniture, craft supplies, and, of course, tiaras, boas, and wigs. "The original store is what you need; the annex is what you want,"



A window display at IXIA



Kenneth Wingard

they can even arrange same-day delivery to downtown hotels. Your travel partner will gaze lovingly at you.

There's time for one final shopping gasp. Architect/designer **Kenneth Wingard** lives just a few blocks from his eponymous Castro store, and much of the home-décor merchandise is of his own modern-retro design (visit the shop to find out why that's not an oxymoron). He doesn't allow anything in his store that he wouldn't buy himself. Perfect gifts for your sister and brother (one for each of them, two for you).

Surely you've worked up an appetite by now. Head to the corner of Market and Noe streets, and snag a seat at **Café Flore**. This European-style café has served as a community gathering place since 1973. The perfect spot for a coffee and pastry, or some substantial comfort food, Café Flore serves every day from 7 am 'til 10 pm. On a sunny day, it's also a great place to lounge around and get a tan, so expect competition for a much-coveted outdoor table.

No time to lounge? Cross Market Street, and try the soup-and-salad bar at **Harvest Ranch Market**. This grocery oozes whole grains, and the unusual offerings on the salad bar are color-coded: Green is vegan, yellow is vegetarian, and red is meat/fish. Fill a container, purchase a few provisions for the hotel room, and park for a moment on one of the wooden benches out front for some people (and pet) watching.

The Castro welcomes everyone—straight, gay, thin, fat, white, black, furry, bald. And whether you're from Chattanooga, Flagstaff, or Pittsburgh, you will find food you'll like to eat, places you'll want to see, and mementos you simply must buy.



Pink Triangle Park and Memorial



Outdoors at Café Flore



Harvest Ranch Market



Street Florist

GET OUT, GET PROUD: PRIDE 2007

June is Gay Pride month around the world, but it takes on special meaning in San Francisco, where the whole city joins in on the fun.

The culmination of San Francisco's Pride month is the two-day Pride Celebration and Parade, always held during the last weekend in June. The celebration is centered in the Civic Center area (Saturday, noon until 6 pm; Sunday, noon until 7 pm), and the parade kicks off Sunday, June 24, at 10:30 am at Market and Beale streets, marching up Market Street to Eighth Street, where it feeds into the celebration.

The Pride Parade is a moving party, where everyone is welcome, accepted, and, well, proud. Upwards of 750,000 spectators come from near and very far for this fun, safe, family-friendly event, where

you'll see lots of things to delight and surprise you. From hunky Mayor Gavin Newsom riding around on a bicycle, to myriad PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), to GLBT police and firefighters, to dancing boys on club floats, to the most fabulous drag queens you'll ever see, this is a wonderful annual event you don't want to miss.

This year marks the 37th annual Pride Celebration and Parade, with a theme of "Pride Not Prejudice." Don your favorite rainbow item, perch yourself anywhere along the parade route, say hi to your neighbor, and prepare to be proud.

There are many activities and parties going on during Pride weekend; visit www.sfpride.org for information.

INFORMATION:

All listings may be found on Map 2, H6

Best in Show
545 Castro St.
www.bestinshows.com
864-7387

Café Flore
2298 Market St.
www.cafeflore.com
621-8579

Castro Theatre
429 Castro St.
www.thecastrotheatre.com
621-6120

Cliff's Variety
479 Castro St.
www.cliffsvariety.com
431-5365

Cruisin' the Castro
www.cruisinthecastro.com
255-1821

Harvest Ranch Market
2285 Market St.
626-0805

Hot Cookie
407 Castro St.
621-2350

Human Rights Campaign Action Center and Store
600 Castro St.
www.hrc.org
431-2200

IXIA
2331 Market St.
www.ixia.com
431-3134

Kenneth Wingard
2319 Market St.
www.kennethwingard.com
431-6900

Pink Triangle Park and Memorial
www.pinktrianglepark.net

Under One Roof
549 Castro St.
www.underoneroof.org
503-2300