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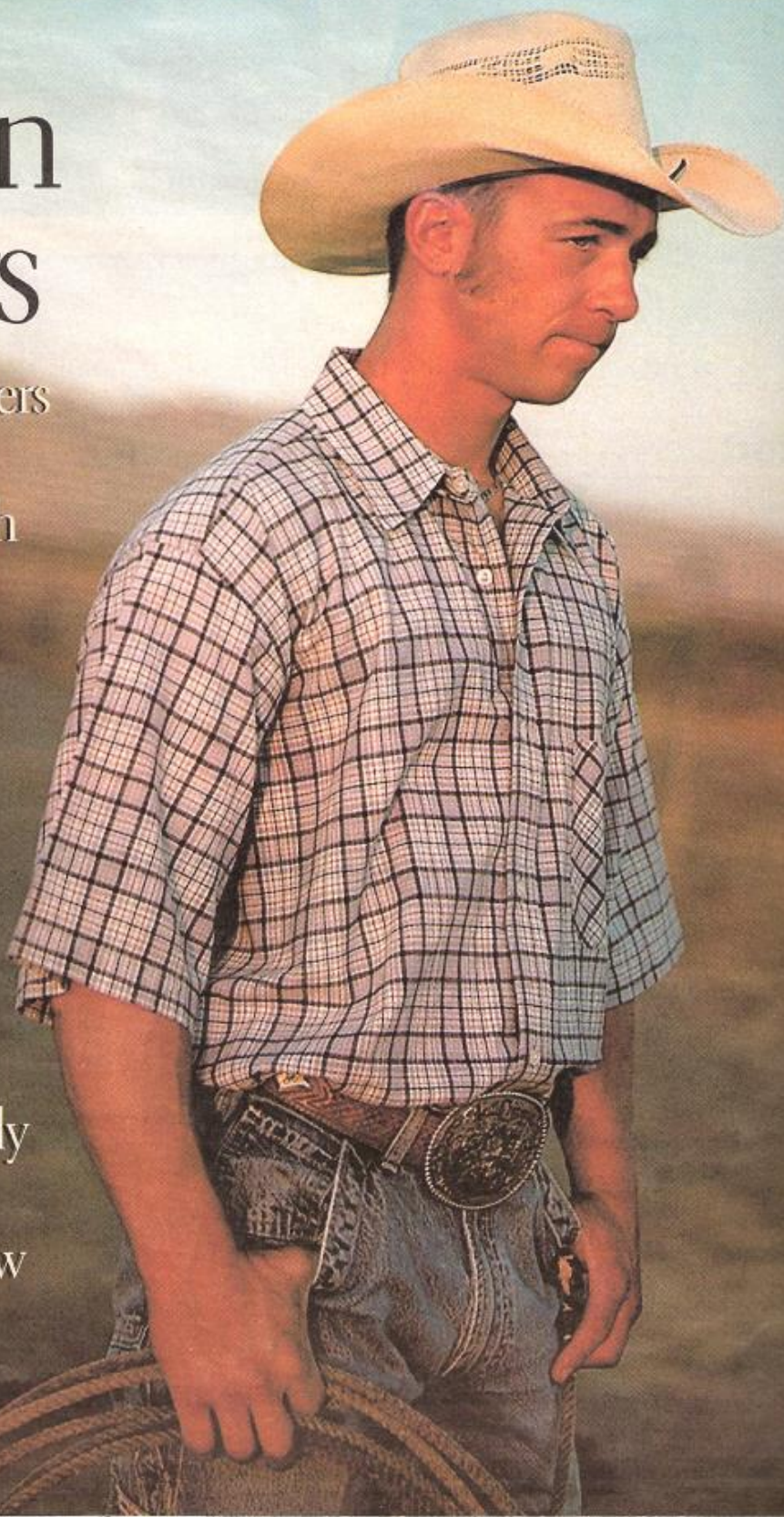
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Under the Grizzly Fountain

Marin Circle tells the story of Berkeley's early aim to be named the state capital



PHOTOGRAPHS BY UZ HAFILIA

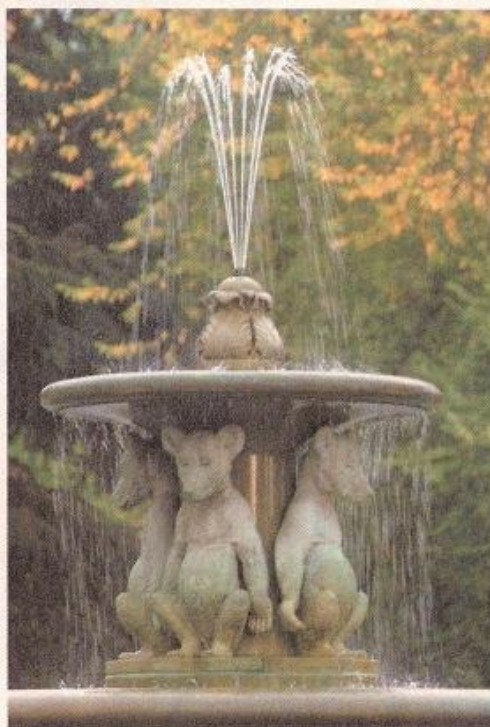
Living near Marin Circle in North Berkeley, Trish Hawthorne always wondered why the streets were named for places like Los Angeles and Fresno, and why there was a Fountain Walk but no fountain to walk to.

"I wandered around the neighborhood not knowing the stories because they weren't written down anywhere," says Hawthorne, who helped get it written down on a plaque where the Fountain Walk meets the Circle. The fountain itself, dedicated five years ago this week, is the center of the story.

Even without the dramatic centerpiece of rain spouting over three potbellied grizzly cubs, the Circle is something to see. It's a roundabout with spokes coming in from six directions. Cars flying down the hill whip around and into the path of cars flying up the hill. The only reason there aren't more broadsides and head-ons is "because everybody is scared to death," says Linda Perry, a member of Friends of the Fountain and Walk.

Perry says 30,000 cars and buses find the Circle a day; to be among them take the Buchanan Street exit off I-80. It connects to Marin Avenue, which passes through Albany and into Berkeley. Two miles up is the Circle, with two-hour parking. That's just about right for an architectural tour of the north corner of Northbrae and a picnic on Indian Rock with a view from San Pablo Bay to San Francisco Bay.

"The history is tangible and yet it's so invisible that



Clockwise from top left: Trish Hawthorne at Indian Rock Park; on the shaded walk down Indian Rock path to Solano Avenue; climber on Indian Rock; the fountain at Marin Circle.

you won't know the story if you don't look carefully," says Hawthorne, who spent 10 years studying archival material and piecing it together.

The story starts in 1907 when the Berkeley Development Co. offered 40 acres and a bay view for a new state capitol, in an attempt to lure the Legislature out of Sacramento. As a friendly gesture all the streets in the area were named after counties. Unfortunately this was offset by one unfriendly gesture: Berkeley was a "dry" city. The state Senate and Assembly both voted for the move, but the liquor lobby led a narrow defeat in a statewide referendum.

The Legislature never arrived to see the grand Beaux Arts entrance to what might have been the capitol grounds. It was designed by John Galen Howard to tie into his design for the University of California two miles south.

The Circle Fountain was dedicated in 1911, and rail commuters walked from the depot up the Fountain Path and into the new subdivision of Northbrae. Then one day in 1958 a motorist failed to negotiate the Circle and plowed through the Fountain. It took nearly 40 years and the donations of 1,200 Friends of the Fountain and Walk to put up a precise replica of a monument that many of its friends had never seen before.

"It was like a face with all the features removed," Hawthorne says, "and when the fountain and balustrade were replaced, it all made sense."

The fountain is surrounded by grass and a fence. There is no crosswalk, an indication that the public is supposed to view it from the classical balustrade across the street. Friends of the Fountain like Linda Perry work traffic control, driving slowly around three or four times just to inspect it. That's how Perry noticed this summer that the bears' water was red. Somebody at Stanford must have sniffed out that four Cal Nobel laureates live around the fountain.

"It's still six months until Big Game Week," said Perry, as her friend Sara Holmes scrubbed out the pink stain with a toothbrush.

The pink sidewalks are permanent, not a prank. They run around the Circle and into the neighborhood. Hawthorne's favorite spoke is Indian Rock, on the north side of the Circle. The street fits the contour of the hill, with homes terraced above. Starting at 961 Indian Rock are three consecutive stucco-clad homes designed in 1910 and 1911 by John Hudson Thomas, who studied under Bernard Maybeck and Galen Howard. The design combines the California craftsman style with avant-garde touches from Europe.

"This is not what the average homeowner would



have wanted," she says. "But they would want it now."

Retaining walls and street pillars are made of the local volcanic rock called Northbrae Rhyolite. One sign surprisingly reads Shattuck, the bucolic end to a main thoroughfare of Berkeley.

At Shattuck and Indian Rock is Indian Rock Park. The rhyolite boulders and outcroppings were a destination before Northbrae was built. There are steps carved into the rock so people could bring picnics up to enjoy the view.

"The sunsets from here are amazing," says Hawthorne. The north face of Indian Rock is a landmark of California climbing lore. Dick Leonard, "the father of modern rock climbing," and David Brower, longtime head of the Sierra Club, learned to climb here.

Ropes and chalk mark Indian Rock Path, which goes right through a climbing class and down some steps to Arlington Avenue, the major thoroughfare of Northbrae. To the right is 883 Arlington, a trademark Julia Morgan with a recessed porch and detailed door. The stickers in the window are not a Morgan detail.

The electric trolley once ran along Arlington but now the electricity is going underground, replaced by tasteful posts and street lamps. Turning left onto Mendocino Avenue, the route goes by 900 Mendocino, designed in 1911 by Walter Ratcliff, another famed Berkeley architect. Across the street at 911 and 919 are two more early Thomas designs.

Mendocino feeds back up to the Circle. For a detour, after the last house on the right, you can take a walking path to Solano Avenue, the commercial strip of Northbrae.

To get from Solano back to the Circle, turn right on Contra Costa Avenue and left on Los Angeles Avenue. That is a bad name in Berkeley, but the residents have done what they could. Los Angeles Avenue is certainly more beautiful than anything in the county it is named for.

Hawthorne will vouch for it. Like so many before and after, she grew up in L.A., came to Cal and never went back. ♦

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